Preface

Larsen Legacy Volume 10: "Finding Our Way" is a continuation of the "Legacy" book series. It chronicles the experiences of the Stephen and Susan Larsen Family for the years 2009 and 2010. It is based on the weekly letters that were sent out to children and grandchildren who were spread far and wide and who depended on this weekly missive to keep informed and connected.

Little did any of us realize in January of 2009 that before the month ended our family patriarch, husband, and father would be taken from us. His death, so sudden and unexpected, hardly left us time to catch our breath. Following the outpouring of love from family and community, the memorials both written and spoken, and the funeral proceedings, we parted ways; each family returning to their home and daily walk. Now each of us faced the reality of his absence from our lives.

This book is a snapshot of those years immediately following Steve's departure and our family's efforts to find our way, hopefully reflecting in our lives the goodness Steve exemplified in his.

I would not describe our family as bereft or devastated in the ensuing years. Rather, let us say sorrowful, lonely, and melancholy. Let us also say comforted, buoyed up, strengthened, and united. For we had been promised his awareness of us and help in times of need. Indeed, when talking of our experiences during this sacred time, we all felt the undeniable strength of the sealing power of our temple covenants which gave us hope for a glorious tomorrow and reason to rejoice in the gospel today.

Dedication

To all who experienced these memorable years as well as to those who hadn't yet arrived in our family circle. Hopefully all of you will be enriched and warmed by a rehearsal of these events.

Acknowledgements

To all who submitted pictures to add color and realism to the story; to SaraKay for her many hours of editing and proofreading; to John who formatted and submitted the finished product to Lulu; to Steve who helped with uploads, downloads, and any other "load" I happened to be carrying.

The Larsen Legacy

Volume 10: 2009-2010

Finding Our Way

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2009

January 3, 2009

[Mom] We've had a wonderful holiday despite the disappointment of not getting to visit Becky in Arizona. On Tuesday Stephani and kids, Tim, and Mike and Marci all arrived. We played games, visited, and had a brief musical program including numbers from Sam and Josh on their sax and cello and singing some songs from the Messiah. Their main reason for coming was so that Stephani could orient me on a new Family History software program, Legacy 7, that the Bennions and Andersons gave us for Christmas. Lind's mother, Sandra, has used it and recommended it to Stephani. She is really involved in family history work and feels like it is the best on the market right now.

I was especially grateful for some time to visit with Katie about her upcoming six month stay in China. She will be living with several other college girls and they will teach English at an elementary school. They will arrive in time to be a part of the Chinese New Year celebrations and get to enjoy a wonderful cultural experience as they teach and then tour and travel. She is excited for the opportunity to use her Chinese.

Mike and Marci arrived about 7:30. Marci had had a bout of the flu all day and she went right to bed while the rest of us visited and then got Amber and Ellie down for the night. Wednesday morning, we all decorated gingerbread houses before the Bennions left for Logan and the rest of us settled in for Christmas Eve. We watched Kung Fu Panda, wrapped gifts, delivered Christmas goodies, and had a peaceful Christmas Eve. Mike, Tim, SaraKay and I played some word games and we all went to bed about 11:00. We decided that if Amber and Ellie slept in that we wouldn't wake them and so Christmas morning SaraKay came piling onto our bed about seven and we gathered in Mike and Marci and Tim for the gift opening. It was pretty quiet and peaceful for a while and then Amber woke up and joined in the fun.

We had a very leisurely Christmas Day and enjoyed hearing from most of you. We had been experiencing a lot of snow and winds and had pretty much decided to wait until the next day to make the trip to AZ to visit the Seely's. Later in the afternoon a friend of SaraKay's dropped in to visit and commented that the roads were clearing off and that it wasn't that bad on the main roads. Daddy had been on the internet off and on most of the day checking road conditions and said that the Malad Pass was still open and it looked like traffic was still moving between here and SLC. About four we decided to make a run for it, our reasoning being that if we could get a few hours of travel behind us on Christmas, we wouldn't have as far to go on Friday. We quickly finished up our packing and headed out the door. Mike and Marci had also planned to do their traveling that afternoon; they were going to leave for Burley soon after we left.

We hadn't gotten very far before we realized that the storm was far worse than we had anticipated. The freeway was sheer glass with lots of cars off the side of the road in the barrow pits, and traffic moving at a snail's pace. We quickly called Mike and alerted him of conditions and they put their departure on hold. Thank goodness they did because within a short while the freeway to Burley would be closed entirely and they would have had to turn around and come back. We continued on, thinking that surely, we had left the worst of the storm behind us, but the further we went the worse it got until we were engulfed in a huge storm that drifted in the freeway and left the visibility at zero. Daddy kept pressing on, doing his best to tail a Subaru that was breaking trail for us. Sometimes the road was so obscured that that was the only way we could see where we were going. Probably the most frightening thing was the large semi-trucks that were on the road and with things so slick and the snow so deep, it was risky to get around them or have them pass us. Most of the time we were traveling between 20-30 miles an hour. It was one of the most frightening experiences we've had in a long time.

When we started to get close to Tremonton, Becky called and gave us a number for the Utah Road Conditions and I started calling it to determine if things were going to continue or improve towards Salt Lake. The taped response was always "Wet and Overcast." We figured that that must mean that the roads were wet but clear. The tape also said that the freeway and pass at Cedar City was closed because of blizzarding. We figured we could at least get that far and then continue on the next day. While we were fighting high winds, drifting snow, and icy conditions near the Ogden area, I asked for conditions from Ogden to Kaysville and the response was "Wet and overcast!" We knew that we were in trouble

because we were going about 20 miles an hour and there was no relief in sight.

I felt like Daddy had to be the one to make the decision to keep going or give up. He was such a trooper but I could see that he couldn't drive in these conditions and survive another 12-13 hours with this kind of stress. He felt that we should get off the freeway and spend the night and check Friday's forecast. I knew Kathy's number by heart so I called her, but she had a house full of company and gave me Deniece’s number. We tried Karen and Jim's too, but no one answered. Deniece's number kept ringing busy but we decided to chance it; we arrived at Deniece’s late Thursday night.

Tim kept saying, "Mom, you just can't knock on her door and expect her to welcome us all in. That is a huge imposition." I knew it was but I didn't know what else to do. Well, we did knock on Deniece's door and she and Don and Carolee were so sweet and gracious and made us feel right at home. We looked and felt like we'd been through the war but they had warm beds and were so good to us. We fell into bed after checking road conditions for the next day and also called Becky and alerted her to our predicament. She was very understanding although I know it was a great disappointment. She had gone to so much work and planning for our visit and we felt badly for letting them down.

Friday morning, we waited until about 10:00 before leaving for home. I-84 was closed and I-15 was closed until later in the morning. Although the storm was mostly over in Idaho, Utah had stormy conditions all across the state and the highway through Cedar City and St. George area was one of the worst. We traveled home on snow packed and icy roads and arrived home just as Mike and Marci were getting themselves in the car to leave for Burley. They expressed gratitude for our phone call alerting them to road conditions but said that Mike had just learned that the road to Burley was closed just a few minutes before we called them so they were already settling in for another night.

We were so relieved to get everyone safely home. Sunday SaraKay and I went to pick up Tricia Mangum to go with us to McKay Reader's farewell and we got stuck in her driveway. SaraKay suggested that she run home and get her car and we could go to the meeting and deal with the stuck car later. When Daddy and Tim went to pull the car out, there was something wrong with it and the wheels wouldn't turn. Monday, he called Rod Love and he had to get a tow trailer and get it to the station that way. We haven't heard yet what is the matter with it, but we're glad it didn't happen while we were enroute to Phoenix. We'll hope for a simple solution.

This Saturday we will be taking SaraKay to Rexburg. I know that she is good and ready but this is such a major thing for Daddy and me; hopefully we can adjust and it won't be hard to have this "empty nest" thing going on in our lives. I keep reminding myself that she is only one hour away and that I need to buck up and let go! Life just hands us so many different situations to adjust to that sometimes I just want to say, "Stop! No more changes and transitions!" Of course, that never works, so I try to roll with it and keep my equilibrium.

[Dad] The Camry's problem appears to be a fault in the master brake cylinder. It isn't a very common problem, so the part is not readily available and it looks like Monday or Tuesday before we will get the car back.

We have enjoyed watching a few bowl games this year. It is so nice to record them and fast forward through all the ads so the game ends up being a couple of hours instead of three or four. We enjoyed the Sugar Bowl last night and were pleased with Utah's outstanding performance.

Let me share a quick thought in closing: *"You can't expect to prevent negative feelings altogether. And you can't expect to experience positive feelings all the time. The Law of Emotional Choice directs us to acknowledge our feelings but also to refuse to get stuck in the negative ones." - Greg Anderson*

January 9, 2009

[Mom] We've had a quiet week. I have been working on family history projects and Daddy has been getting things finished up with rechartering. SaraKay seems to be adjusting well and feels like BYU-I is a great place to be. She likes her roommates and has enjoyed her classes. Of course, the weather has been terrible but she hasn't minded it too much. She is good to call and keep us in the loop so we are getting along okay in this big, quiet house.

I called on Tuesday to wish Katie "Bon Voyage" or whatever it is when someone is going far, far, away. She was flying out that afternoon. When I called Stephani yesterday to see if they had heard from her, Stephani said that they had and that I could include her email in this week's family letter.

Here goes (hope you have time to read it. *Here! Safe! Love it! Love you! from the Traveling Kate."*

We're grateful she is safe and will keep her in our prayers. I mentioned that I have been working on several projects. The first is my personal history and our family history. I am very close to having it completed right up until the time we started writing a weekly letter. When I get to that time I am going to scan in the letters and just publish them in volumes by years.

This personal history has been a huge undertaking and I have been putting in four and five hours a day on it so that I can get it finished. I spent part of Wednesday at the Family History library getting one-on-one help with some research.

Yesterday I decided to figure out for myself how to scan my family letters and gather them digitally into a folder that I can submit to a publisher. I am trying my best to be independent in all of this but yesterday was a nightmare. I decided to call HP Tech support and let someone help me learn to scan. A very sweet Filipino individual was on the line. He was very knowledgeable when I could understand what he was saying, but it took me a while to figure out his accent. I called him at 10:30 and we made a beginning. He was very patient with me and my limited knowledge of computers. He guided me through all kinds of commands and I was still taking orders when Dad arrived home at 12:10. I handed the phone to Daddy and he continued while I pulled together a quick lunch. Daddy ate while something was downloading and then got back on and was on for another 2 hours! I was sitting at his side as he followed commands and tried to get the machine to scan multiple documents so that we could edit them. Finally, it was determined that because we don't have Word Perfect Vista or just Word Perfect, that this scanner cannot work with our computer to do the editable scans. By the time we said goodbyes to our Filipino friend, Daddy and I were both bleary-eyed and exhausted.

My next project was to go through a group of 400 slides I received from Mom. I had gone through a lot of them with her when she visited several years ago and had written notes of what the slides were. The thing I didn't realize was that the whole lower level of slides were ones that my dad took of our family. I had a little view finder that lit up when you put a slide in it and I had a wonderful couple of hours looking at all these pictures of our family that I had never seen before! It was like a sweet gift from my dad that he had been saving to brighten my day! I finished the slides and started calling photo places to see what they would charge to make the slides into a CD and they quoted me 75 cents a picture! Daddy thinks he can buy a little machine and we can do it ourselves, so we are investigating that. I called Kathy and she wants us to make a picture book of the Pakistan experience and to publish Mom and Dad's journals.

As you can see, I have bitten off more than I can comfortably chew but having a variety of projects has helped me keep with it. I'm determined to get most of this done before we start serving missions. Daddy has been so patient and long suffering with all my "hair-brained" schemes. He is even sorting through his own stuff and collecting so that he can get started on his own history!

January 14, 2009

[Mom] I've spent the morning doing laundry and getting packed for our trip to Phoenix. We will be leaving early tomorrow morning and driving to SLC to catch a flight to Arizona. We will attend Whitni's wedding dinner that evening. Lisa was happy to know that we would be there for their big occasion and we were grateful to have it work out. We will be staying with Chet and Becky and get in on several of the children's activities, wedding festivities, and return home after attending Becky's Sunday meetings.

The only downside of going this weekend is that it is Martin Luther King's birthday on Monday and it is also Daniel Smith's mission homecoming on Sunday, so SaraKay will be coming home for part of the weekend. She said she doesn't mind being here alone so we'll stock the fridge and have some time with her on Monday. She has loved her situation; her roommates are "kindred spirits." She is loving her music classes and surviving Theory. Her fear was that she would be at the bottom of her music classes, but she is in the middle and happy with that.

Last week, when we home taught the Anderson family, we challenged them to take the missionary lessons. They agreed and I also invited them to dinner before the lesson. Later, after lining up the exact time with the missionaries, we tried to reach them but to no avail. We continued praying that they would be willing, and Sunday I finally reached Shaunna and she said that they would come.

Yesterday I put stuff in the crock pot and left about noon to work in the cannery in Idaho Falls. Later I finished getting the meal ready, and at 6:30 sharp Shaunna arrived-- without Craig. He had gotten home from work and was too tired to come, so Shaunna came alone. I suspected she knew that I would be putting a lot of time and energy into the meal and didn't want to disappoint me. We had a nice meal and visit before the missionaries arrived. Shaunna has had a pretty tough life, including abandonment by both parents, birthing several children out of wedlock, times of unemployment, and now living with a fellow who isn't her husband. She is looking for work but I spent quite a bit of time going over what she would need to do to get back into school and qualify for a regular job instead of just picking up part-time work here and there.

Her response to the missionary discussion was positive and we felt like we had had a nice evening. Later we lined her up to visit with Bishop Goodwin about working at Deseret Industries. I sent her home with information about FAFSA and told her that next week I would help her find out what ITEC and the ISU Technical College could offer her.

I am always amazed at how troubled some of our missionary contacts are. Shaunna has so many hurdles to jump before she could be baptized; she smokes, drinks alcohol and coffee, is living out of wedlock, and is pretty indoctrinated from being a member of the Jehovah Witness Church. I know I just need to carry on and exercise faith that the Lord will do the rest.

I've been encouraged about getting these histories started. It has been especially helpful to send out a general email to the family and receive back answers within days or even hours. It really helps me to keep my momentum. I am always amazed and humbled by the offers of help that have come when I've sent out a plea. David mentioned that if our machine for converting slides to a DVD doesn't perform well, he can do all the slides for us there at his work for free (one of the perks of his job). Several of the rest of you have made other offers of help and I realize just how wonderful it is to be surrounded by a family who have resources and knowledge that can extend my own.

January 20, 2009

[Mom] We arrived home last night about 10:00 after a quick flight from Phoenix and clear roads between here and SLC. We had a wonderful time with Chet and Becky. Becky picked us up at the airport about 2:30 on Thursday and we dropped by to pick up the kids from school. They have a lovely home with a great backyard. It has a pool, a hot tub, basketball court, small putting green, lawn swings, fire pit with natural gas, and a patio kitchen. The weather was so pleasant that we could have stayed outside the entire time. What a great place for a family. Although the homes in their development are close together, there are high cement fences that separate the backyards and there is ample room for lawn and a play area.

Thursday night we attended Whitni's wedding dinner. It was fun to get acquainted with her groom. He is certainly a fine young man and they both were all smiles. Because of the large number of immediate family, we didn't attend the temple ceremony but we went to the reception on Friday night. The ward building looked a lot like an old Spanish mission building with white stucco walls, a large tower, arched entry ways and open inner courts. It had the traditional round tiles for the roof. It was such pleasant weather that they had their receiving line in the open court. It was amazing to be able to be outside in mid-January! We stayed for most of the reception since Becky's kids know Don and Lisa's girls and they let them help carry gifts and pal around with them.

On Friday we attended the school's "Jingle Jog" that is normally held before Christmas but was delayed. Becky ran the mile and 1/4 with Cole and Larsen, and then when Maddie and Tate ran, she ran with them. It is a program designed to get the kids running and all the children in grades K-6 participated. There were lots of teachers who were also running and the fellow in charge of athletics was on a bike leading the way and showing the kids the course. It was such a festive occasion and really heart-warming to watch the kids finish the race and feel the satisfaction. It wasn't a competition, just an event that highlighted physical fitness and the fun of running. Dad and I sat on lawn chairs and cheered them on and took a few pictures, although it would have been nearly impossible to pick out the kids in that huge throng if Becky hadn't been running with them.

That night we had a marshmallow roast in the backyard. We bundled up in blankets and enjoyed the fire, watching the night sky, eating chips, and just having a great time. Chet commented that this was his kind of camping!

Saturday morning, we attended a football game to watch Larsen play. He is on a 4, 5, and 6-year-old team that is coached by a fellow in their ward. It was fun to meet some of Becky and Chet's friends and see how good the adult leaders were with the kids. The game is simplified to the age of the players and everything was very positive and upbeat. Chet took us to a place called "The Farm" for lunch. It was a pecan orchard with a lot of picnic tables and a quaint building where they sold all kinds of soups, salads, desserts, and sandwiches. The food was delicious and when the kids finished eating, they occupied themselves gathering pecans that had fallen on the ground.

That afternoon Jeanie, Bethany (and boyfriend), Jeremy and his wife, Marcia and their new baby, and David all came to visit. We had a great time catching up on the news. Jeremy and David are both attending ASU and majoring in architecture and engineering respectively. David's wife was at work and couldn't come, and Jeremy left shortly for work, but his wife Marcia and their new two-week-old baby was with her. Bethany is living at home, working full time, and taking a court recorder course online. Scott didn't come since he was preparing for an upcoming festival.

That night we had a hot tub party and watched a Star Trek movie. On Sunday we walked to a nearby park and then got ready for meetings. They have the 1-4 schedule, so we had time to play some games, eat dinner, and then attend their ward with them. It was interesting that the speakers were a family who had recently moved in and the father commented that his wife was from Michigan and he was from Idaho. Daddy leaned over and whispered in my ear, "I think he is Larry Leatham's son." Larry is a member of our stake and has been a good friend for many years. After the meeting we went up to visit and sure enough, he was from our area and had attended Snake River High School. Small world.

While the rest of the family attended Primary and Sunday School, Chet drove us to the airport. It was interesting that Brother Leatham had commented in his talk that he was surprised the since the Phoenix Cardinals were playing during that time. When we got to our gate and sat to wait, we noticed a huge group of people standing in the concourse by a sports bar. It was evident that they were all watching the Cardinals game and throughout our wait in the airport, the cheers and response to the game created a very festive atmosphere. Usually airports are so impersonal, but not that day. It was fun to watch the crowd and their elation at winning and qualifying to be in the Super Bowl. I couldn't help thinking how hard it is to feel the spirit of the Sabbath when you don't honor it. We regretted having to spend most of our day in travel but it couldn't be avoided. We appreciated all Becky and Chet's sacrifices to make this trip so enjoyable.

SaraKay called this morning and she had had a great weekend. She said that Sunday is one of the most fun days of the week at BYU-I with having guys over to dinner, playing games, attending stadium singing, firesides, meetings, and just relaxing. We're so happy that life is good for her and that she is enjoying school.

[Dad] Amen to Sue's comments on our trip to Arizona. As we were getting ready to go to bed after our first day there, I noticed in the mirror that I was sunburned!! It was so amazing to be enjoying 80-degree weather, while at home it was closer to zero.

I guess my tolerance for grandkid manhandling is increasing--it was so fun to be mauled by the Seely kids and it was so fun to see them in their own environment. Right after sacrament meeting a woman ahead of us turned around and said, "You're moving into our ward I hope--I could sure use another tenor like you."

This is a really great quote I ran across: *"Like the eye which sees everything in front of it and never sees itself, faith is occupied with the Object upon which it rests and pays no attention to itself at all. While we are looking at God, we do not see ourselves--blessed riddance. The man who has struggled to purify himself and has had nothing but repeated failures will experience real relief when he stops tinkering with his soul and looks away to the perfect One." - A. W. Tozer*

That is so true, the only way to perfection is getting outside of ourselves, looking outward and upward to the perfect One. Thanks to Becky, Chet, and their kids for the enjoyable four days and for their gracious hospitality. Next time I will be sure to take a swim suit so I don't have to go in the hot tub in my pajama bottoms.

January 26, 2009

[Steve, the younger] As some of you now know, Dad is really sick. About Thursday, he came home sick with chills and fever. He went right to bed. The next morning, he wasn't any better. He was so exhausted and tired he stayed in bed. He had a fever off and on, but no other flu-like symptoms.

Saturday, he took a bite of food and then raced to the bathroom and started vomiting. Later, he and Mom had scheduled to go to Rexburg for a concert. It was storming outside and Dad didn't want Mom going by herself, so he drove with her to the Snow Building for a concert. He was so weak; he could hardly get into the building. It was scary.

At some time in the night, Mom heard him moaning. He had fallen and was draped over the tub and didn't have the strength to get up. Mom helped him get into bed. He pretty much stayed there, and didn't have an appetite.

When Mom got home Sunday at noon, he was the same. Dad told Mom he needed help. Mom got Dad into the Insta-care in Blackfoot. At first, they thought he had had a heart attack, but they did an EKG, and his heart was fine. Then, they drew his blood and realized he had a problem. What was normally at the 100 level was at the 600 level. The individual assisting with the blood work said she had never seen anyone with it at that level.

They tried to get him stabilized. Eventually, the doctor said, "I can't treat you. This is very serious. We need to get you to Pocatello to the blood specialist."

Sunday afternoon the doctor in Pocatello determined that Dad probably does NOT have leukemia (although that hasn't been ruled out entirely.) The doctors are very hopeful that they are close to a diagnosis. In the meantime, he is stabilized, but will be in the ICU for 3-4 days. He is not out of the woods yet, but at least he is getting stabilized. I will send out daily updates to keep you posted. Thank you for your love and prayers in Dad's behalf. Mom thinks we've already witnessed a miracle with Dad being alive after his blood getting to the 600 mark. Little Steve

February 20, 2009

It's Friday afternoon and I've cleaned the house, gone to town, unloaded the car, and I'm just sitting here thinking that I am too tired to do anything else, so I am going to do what I have wanted to do for the last three weeks...write my sweet granddaughter in faraway China.

Dear Katie,

I have tried to get updates from your mom and one time when I called her, I could tell that your brothers were talking to you on Skype! Isn't it marvelous what technology can do? About 28 years ago my parents left Moses Lake, Washington for a 21-month stint in Pakistan. They lived in Peshawar, a town of about 40,000 people and were the only members of the Church. They lived there in a walled compound during the Afghanistan war and saw more suffering and poverty than most of us see in a lifetime. It was a very difficult 21 months for Grandma Ilene but my dad really enjoyed the work he did with the Ministry of Agriculture. During that separation the only way we had of keeping touch was by snail mail. The time it took for a letter to arrive was about three weeks. We couldn't call because it was too expensive (about $200 for a short conversation). My mother really suffered from homesickness. How different her experience would have been if she had had Skype or email!

I hope that your mom has forwarded the write-ups that some of the kids have done on Grandpa's funeral. They do a great job of capturing the events of those days. I am still having a hard time accept that Grandpa is gone for good. I get up each morning and get into my day and it seems that he is near so I haven't been too lonely yet. I keep thinking that he is going to walk in the back door any minute and join me for supper. I know that with time I will feel the loss more keenly but I truly have been sustained by the faith and prayers of so many loving family and friends. I know that you have been praying for me, too. I pray for you, too. But now I know that Grandpa can "hie to Kolob" and that he can be near you and help protect and comfort you. Of course, you already have the Gift of the Holy Ghost, and he has already been there to help you.

Katie, it would have been so sweet to have you a part of the past few weeks, but I know how proud Grandpa and I are of what you are doing with your life and Grandpa would understand that you are "away on the Lord's errand." I hope you are just reveling in this wonderful opportunity to be in China! I've always been fascinated by the Asian cultures and especially China. Of course, you probably know that one of my favorite books is "The Good Earth" by Pearl S. Buck. It made such an impression on me when I first read it and I think it opened by eyes to the many hardships and sufferings that generations of people have endured who have been born in China. I am so grateful for all my blessings and can't help but rejoice that my life is rich and full! I love you, Katie, and pray every day that this experience will be all that you want it to be. Love, Grandma Susan

March 7, 2009

The past few weeks have been so full of bittersweet memories; I hardly know where to begin. I want to record my experiences as best I can because I know how easily time can erase the small details that mean so much.

This past year Daddy and I had been preparing in earnest for our upcoming missions. We had assessed our home and got the siding and roofing done since whether we sold it prior to serving or left it vacant, it needed to be done. We installed a sprinkler system so that the yard care would be simplified. The improvements on the house took the better part of the summer but we were pleased and grateful to have it turn out so well.

Another goal we had was to be debt free. This has been a goal for many years but it wasn't until we received the inheritance money from both sets of parents that we were able to see this goal met. Daddy was trying so hard to get our finances in order so that our retirement could go for our mission expenses.

When we went in for tithing settlement, we told Bishop Goodwin that we would be available for full-time service starting January of 2010. We expressed that we needed to serve close to home until SaraKay was a little older and more settled. We mentioned Deseret Industries, the Employment Service, the Idaho Falls cannery, and the Visitor's Center. Bishop Goodwin assured us that he would let President Jenks know our availability date.

When he turned 65 last December, I sensed for the first time that Daddy was tired of working and dreading his last 12 months of employment. He carried a heavy load and his work often included nights, Saturdays, and occasionally even Sunday meetings.

He would comment that he didn't know what he would do if Kirk Kirkham (Cedar Badge), Don Scott (Tiger Ear Booth), and Leslie Mickelsen (non-denominational pack and troop) decided to quit before he retired. Steve depended so heavily on them and did all he could to foster these relationships. In return, these people worked their hearts out for Dad. I was so grateful for them!

A few weeks ago, he asked me if I thought he should have a retirement party in the Idaho Falls office like was done for his boss, Kim Hansen, or just one at the Blackfoot Office since that is where he had been the last few years. I favored the Blackfoot office. He did too, but commented that he wasn't really looking forward to the fuss and wished he could just retire without all the hoopla.

Several years ago, Kim Hansen changed Dad's position from Endowment Director to Blackfoot District Executive and supervisor. One advantage of this new position was that Daddy officed here in Blackfoot and so he did a lot less traveling. I loved it because he was close enough that he could come home each noon and have lunch with me. He then would go in to take a nap for the last half of his lunch hour. This daily routine not only gave us some nice time together but helped Daddy's health. He seldom got a cold or anything else that was going around and he often said that his daily nap had made such a difference in his energy level. It was nice for us both.

The Thursday (January 22) that Daddy got sick, he had come home for lunch and laid down to take his usual nap. Normally he wakes himself up and so when he didn't get up after a half hour, I peeked in the bedroom. He was snoring away and looked so tired that I decided to just let him sleep. Finally, after an hour and a half, he came out of the bedroom and commented that he couldn't believe that he had slept that long! He gathered himself together and was out the door. I went about my usual activities and about 4:00 I started supper. I was standing at the stove, when the back door opened. Daddy came in on the run, briefcase and computer case in his hands.

"I've had fever and chills all afternoon. I'm sick and I'm going to bed." He laid down for about an hour and then got up for supper. He still didn't feel very good so he watched BYUTV for a while and then sat in his big chair and listened to a story on tape that he had started a few days earlier. Friday he still didn't feel good so he called the office and took a sick day. He sat in his big chair for most of the day, either watching BYUTV or listening to his story with ear phones. The day passed peacefully and we watched an episode of Monk that evening together.

On Saturday (January 24) we had planned to go to Rexburg for SaraKay's first choir concert. I told Daddy that I could go alone, but he didn't want to miss the concert so we decided that I would drive and he could rest. When we got to Rexburg, we got SaraKay and took her to Wendy's for supper and then she went back to the apartment to get ready for the concert.

We arrived at the Snow Building early so that SaraKay could show us her practice room. Dad

said that he would just sit on one of the benches outside the concert hall while I went with SaraKay. We left him on a bench. SaraKay played through a couple of her pieces and then we checked our phones to make sure that Daddy hadn't called. He hadn't and soon we went into the concert hall to take our seats. We had a short wait before the concert began and I struck up a conversation with a fellow sitting next to me that was a potato grower from Aberdeen who had gotten some seed potatoes from Grandpa Larsen years ago. We visited and kept trying to bring Steve into the conversation but he didn't say much which was totally out of character for him.

We loved the concert, but when it was over Steve commented that he felt so tired that he knew I was going to have to help him get to the car. We waited until the hall had partially cleared out and then we moved toward the exit. Steve stood behind me with his hands on my shoulders and I gently pushed our way through the crowded lobby. He got in the car and I walked across the street to tell SaraKay goodbye. She had gone home early to do her laundry.

When I got back in the car Steve was driving and we went to get Krislyn McCandless who had lined up to ride home with us. When we picked her up, I felt hesitant to have Daddy driving because he seemed so out of it. It was strange because he didn't have a cough, a cold, he wasn't vomiting or didn't have diarrhea. When we got to the highway he seemed to be driving erratically and I suggested that I drive. He said that he was alright but I felt almost alarmed by the way he was weaving. When the car hit the bumps on the side of the road, it startled him and I commented that I wish he would just let me drive. I was trying to be patient and polite because of our passenger in the back seat but I was becoming increasingly worried about our safety.

He drove a little farther and then swerved and hit the bumps on the other side of the road. At that point I think he realized that he was not doing well and he pulled over. He got out and walked around the car and I slid over and he got into the passenger front seat. He put the seat back and relaxed and Krislyn and I spent the rest of the trip visiting about school and other things. When we got home Steve went right to bed. He told me that he had called Randy Cox while I was in the practice room with SaraKay and asked him to substitute for him in the Gospel Doctrine class the next morning. I was relieved since I felt like Daddy just needed to go to bed to beat the "bug" he had. We both thought that Daddy might have Valley Fever. We had just been with Becky in Phoenix and we remembered that Grandpa Larsen had gotten Valley Fever when he had served a mission there. It had a lot of the same symptoms that Steve was experiencing.

About three Sunday morning (Jan. 25), I awoke to the sound of moaning. I saw the bathroom light was on and I opened the door to find him hunched over the side of the bathtub. He said that he had fallen when he had gotten up to go to the bathroom and couldn't get up. I helped him and he was soon back in bed, fast asleep. I got up early to get ready for our Sunday meetings and he continued to sleep. I awoke him before I left for meetings so he would know where I was.

The minute his eyes were open, he asked me what time it was and I told him that it was about 8:40. He almost leapt out of bed. He started putting on his Levi's and commented that he was going to go to the church and set up the screen and projector so Randy could show a DVD segment during the class. I said, "You're sick, Steve, just stay home and let him use the library projector and TV." He was determined to go to the church. He said that he could set it up during sacrament meeting and just slip out the back door of the building and no one would have to see him and he wouldn't have to get dressed in his suit. I finally convinced him to go back to bed and rest. I told him that after his falling spell the night before, he shouldn't be up unless I was there. He got back into bed and I left for meetings.

When I got home from church at noon, he was dressed, sitting in his chair watching "Music and the Spoken Word." He said that he still didn't feel well and thought we ought to go in to the Insta-care. I agreed. I asked him if he would like a blessing. He said he would and we called our home teacher, Nick Barnard, and he got Randy Cox and they were soon at our door. Nick gave Steve a beautiful blessing and promised him that he would be able to get the correct diagnosis and that he would be made whole.

I drove him to the clinic and we went in. Steve's doctor, Doctor McKinley, just happened to be on call that day and they took him in immediately. They thought that he had had a heart attack and did an EKG, but his heart was sound and fine. They then ran some blood tests and discovered that his blood sugars were over 600! (Normal is around 100.) Dr. McKinley did some other tests and came in to tell us that he

suspected that Steve had leukemia. He felt that we needed to get to a specialist immediately.

We decided to go to Pocatello since it was a little closer to where our kids lived. Dr. McKinley said that he would call ahead and alert Dr. Francisco and Dr. Gonzales who were two specialists at the Portneuf Medical Center. I drove, nearly causing an accident at the big intersection by McDonalds, when I realized at the last minute that we didn't have enough gas to get us to Pocatello. I drove straight through the intersection instead of turning left on the green arrow. Just as this drama was playing itself out, Steve called us and I was trying to talk on the phone, get to the service station, and I about scared Daddy to death! He yelled, "You're going to kill us before we even get to the hospital!" It was a tense but funny moment in an otherwise very sobering situation.

When we got to the hospital, we checked in. They put Daddy in a wheelchair and we gave the doctors all the blood samples and reports from the Blackfoot Immediate Care Center. They read them; I could tell by their expressions that something was very wrong.

So began our saga in the ICU as the doctors and nurses came in and out, putting in IV's and hooking him up to several hanging bags of liquid. They were giving him shots of insulin to try to bring down the blood sugars and pumping him full of antibiotics. I was so grateful that he was getting good help and I felt optimistic that he would begin to respond. About nine I left for home. By that time, I had let the kids know that he was sick and that I would keep in touch with them regarding his progress.

The next morning (Jan. 26) I got up and got right to the hospital. I spent the day in ICU where the staff continued to try to get his fever and blood sugars regulated. One of the big questions that Daddy and I both had was how his sugars had gotten so far out of whack when they had been so normal just days before. Doctor Gonzales told us that the first thing that signals an infection in a diabetic is that the blood sugars rise. We didn't know this since Daddy had been healthy and never had to deal with an infection since being diagnosed a few years ago. Dr. Gonzales told us that she thought Dad had Legionnaires Disease as well as pneumonia. That seemed like something we could deal with and we continued to be optimistic.

For most of Monday morning I sat in the hospital room answering calls from family and friends. Mike called and said that he and Marci and the girls would be coming later that afternoon. He asked me if I wanted him to wear his suit so that he could give Dad a blessing. I asked him if he needed another priesthood holder and he said that since Dad had already been anointed by Randy when he received his first blessing, he thought he would be alright giving him the blessing alone.

As I hung up the phone, I wished that I had asked Steve to come when he had offered the day before, but I dismissed the thought. For the next few hours, I sat by Dad's bed and we visited and watched the monitors. It began to dawn on me that despite the massive doses of insulin and antibiotics that he was getting, his vitals weren't changing much. His fever stayed at about 103. The blood sugars stayed close to around 500. At one point his heart started to race and the nurses and doctors were swarming around him, injecting something into his blood stream that would slow down his heart rate. That was very sobering. Until that time I think we were optimistic, but when his heart started racing, we began to wonder just what was going on.

At one point I was sitting in the darkened room with Daddy asleep when the door opened and Steve walked in. Although he wasn't dressed in white, he looked like an angel to me. I hugged him and the tears began to fall. Until then I hadn't realized how much I had needed someone. I also realized that Daddy needed to feel the strength and concern that the kids brought when they arrived. Upon questioning Steve, I learned that the kids had been visiting amongst themselves and decided that they would each take a day and come be with Dad until he was out of danger.

Steve had been emailing family and friends and soon the word was out that Steve was very ill and needed everyone's faith and prayers. We decided that we would hold a family fast on Tuesday. We asked Dad if he wanted the ward to fast for him and he said that for now the family fast would be his choice and that if needs be, the upcoming Sunday the ward could be included.

By about 5:30 Mike and Marci arrived. I took Amber and Ellie into the waiting room and Mike and Marci both went into ICU to visit with Dad. Soon Marci came into the room and told me that Mike and Steve were going to give him a blessing and she wanted me to be there for it. I went into the hospital room and with the blinds drawn and the door closed, Steve and Mike laid

their hands on Dad's head and administered to him. Steve told him that the blessing was one of comfort; that his parents were near and that they were aware of what was going on. There was a very peaceful feeling in the room and many tears were shed. Mike and Marci left soon thereafter and by about 9:30 that evening Steve and I left the hospital and drove home. I had tried to talk Steve into going back to Wellsville but he said that he wanted to stay. Stephani was coming Tuesday afternoon and at that time he would leave.

It was very comforting to have Steve with me that night. We had a late supper and after visiting for a while, we retired for the night. The next morning, we started our fast. Soon after we arrived at the hospital, people started to come to wish Dad well. Normally visitors are limited in ICU, but for some reason the nurses permitted it and Daddy had a constant flow coming and going all day. When Kirk Kirkham came, he and our son, Steve, agreed that they would get the word out through email. Steve had already been doing this for our family, but Kirk said that he would alert the scouting community and that he would request their faith and prayers in Daddy's behalf. This email campaign started a flood of messages that continued to flow for weeks to come.

We so appreciated those who came to the hospital and I know that this show of support cheered Dad up and brought him satisfaction. Gary and Linda, Rick, President and Janet Jenks, President Thalgott, Clark Farrar and other scout professionals, Cedar Badge personnel, Kirk, Jill, Scott and Aaron Kirkham, and members of his high priest quorum all came to visit.

Dr. Francisco had told us on Monday that by Tuesday about three he would be getting all the tests back from Utah and would give us a firm diagnosis. He said that he had studied carefully the blood samples that had been drawn and that he had sent the samples off since a modern machine at the Huntsman Center could read the blood samples with 100% accuracy. That afternoon as we awaited his visit, we continued to visit with Daddy and he commented that he was at peace and felt like everything was going to be fine. We both encouraged Steve to leave for home since Chrissy was being honored at her first New Beginnings that night and he was invited to attend. He knew that Stephani would be there shortly so after closing our fast, I took him to the cafeteria to eat and then he left for Wellsville.

It wasn't until about five that Dr. Francisco gave us the diagnosis. He came into the room and stood at the foot of Daddy's bed and said that all the tests confirmed that it was leukemia. I think Daddy and I both felt relief at that point because we knew that leukemia is one of the cancers that can be treated successfully. When we voiced this to Dr. Francisco he said, "Not if you are an old man and have diabetes." This was a total shock to us and Steve mentioned that he was a biker and had stayed physically fit the last few years to keep his diabetes in control. The doctor said that despite how fit Daddy was, his body was that of a 65-year-old and that he had pneumonia and Legionnaire's disease and was already ravaged by the cancer.

He then showed us a graph that showed the recommended treatment for someone with ALM (acute leukemia melanoma). It showed that anyone 60+ with ALM could go the chemo route if they were in peak condition, but he said that Daddy was already in stage three and the recommended treatment was to make him comfortable. That was it. He further said that if we chose to go with chemotherapy that he would order Life Flight immediately and transport Steve to the Huntsman Cancer Center. He would be zapped with extreme doses of chemo. He would be sicker than a dog and then, if he survived the chemo, all of his marrow would be destroyed and he would have to live in isolation for several months until new marrow had grown. All of this would make Daddy deathly ill and he would be miserable. And then he said that despite all these heroic efforts, he would still die. It was a pretty bleak picture. He recommended that we notify the family and use what time Daddy had left productively.

Daddy was the one to say, "Give us a timeline. Are we talking years or months?" Dr. Francisco answered, "Weeks." My question was, "How long has Steve had this. How could we have been so blind as to not notice the symptoms?" Dr. Francisco replied, "When did he come home sick?" I said, "Thursday at four." He said, "That is how long he has had it. That is why it is called 'acute.'" That gave me a small measure of comfort.

He left and Daddy and I had some time alone. We just sat there holding hands and trying to absorb what we had just been told. He commented to me, "I always thought you would die first." We visited quietly for a while longer and then Stephani arrived. When Stephani walked in, she

said, "Well, how are you doing?" Daddy said, "Not so good. The doctor just told me I have three weeks to live." Her jaw dropped and Dad said, "Ha!" (Although it was getting difficult for Daddy to talk, he frequently said some funny one-liners that always caught us off guard.)

Daddy told us that he wanted us to go to Rexburg and let SaraKay know what was going on. After he got settled for the night we left and drove straight to Rexburg. We arrived at her apartment about 8:45 but she was at the Snow building practicing. We decided to park in front of the building and just wait in the car until we saw her emerge. We were both worried that the minute she saw one of us she would know something was wrong, but we didn't know how else to approach her.

Shortly after nine she came out the front door of the Snow Building. She was carrying her piano book bag and her hair was blowing gently in the night breeze. Steph stepped out of the car and started walking towards her. She called in an animated voice, "Hellooooo, SaraKay Larsen! SaraKay stopped for a moment, identified her older sister, and came running towards her, laughing as she came. It was then that she saw me sitting in the car and came running over, all smiles. When she got in, we told her that we were taking her for ice cream (the opiate of the Larsens.) She immediately asked how Daddy was doing. It was then that I told her that he had leukemia and it was terminal. The doctor thought his time was short. Of course, there were lots of tears and an explanation of the events of the last two days. Stephani was driving and she pulled over to the side of the road and commented that she thought I should be sitting in the back seat with SaraKay. I did and we were able to hold each other while she worked through her tears.

As we sat in the car at Sonic talking through the previous day's events, SaraKay wondered about what she should do and I told her that for now I thought Daddy would want her to stay at school and then come home for the weekend. Her siblings were gathering and she would want to share in this family time with everyone. She agreed and we took her back to her apartment. We had already alerted her roommates about what was going on and they said they would let the Relief Society president know. I called her campus bishop when we got back to Blackfoot so he would know, too.

On the way back to Blackfoot it was snowing and blowing. Stephani was driving and she apologized for driving so slowly. I was sitting in the passenger seat making phone calls and visiting with her about the events of the preceding days. I felt safe and warm and at peace. I knew that the Comforter was helping me deal with the devastating news of only a few hours before.

As we rode home, I mentioned that there were so many things that I didn't know about our financial situation. Daddy had always handled that and I had used my own household account for the family's needs. I asked Stephani if it would seem insensitive of me to bring up finances at a time like this. She thought that we should take our cues from Daddy the next morning.

About 11:30 we pulled into the garage and without much prelude I said, "I am absolutely not growing a garden this year! Not so much as a tomato plant. Because we all know where a tomato plant leads. First a tomato plant, then corn and next thing you know Daddy has brought home all kinds of seeds and the whole garden plot is overrun with pumpkin and zucchini plants!" (Stephani laughed right out loud with me about this comment. It had long been a family joke that I was always "Not going to grow a garden" and somehow Daddy talked me into it every year!")

At 6:30 the next morning the phone rang. It was Dad. He said that he had been unable to sleep much and was thinking through all the things that he knew about our finances that I didn't know. He wanted Stephani and I to get there as fast as we could and he would make a list of my financial resources and passwords. We left a while later and spent some productive time with Daddy before the crowds started to arrive. By about 9:30 people were coming and the phones were ringing. We had Daddy's cell phone, my cell phone, and Stephani's. There were so many calls that even the ICU phones were ringing and the nurses bringing us notes of who was trying to get through to us. It was frenetic. One of the nurses, seeing the parade of visitors commented to the doctor, "Who is this guy?" As I talked things through with Dad, Stephani answered the phones. One of the things Daddy visited with me about was his funeral. He outlined what he wanted and I took notes. Once the visitors started to arrive, our session came to an end.

Kathy and Dick arrived Wednesday and helped with answering phones. The hospice representative visited with me and it was nice to have Kathy there since she dealt so much with this with Grandma Ilene and she knew the

questions to ask. We made the decision to get Daddy home as soon as possible since there was nothing they were doing for him in the hospital that we couldn't handle at home.

The day was truly exhausting, but I knew that it was so sweet for Daddy to have so many of his good friends come to wish him well. Wednesday morning, Andy Bradbury, an ER doctor and close personal friend of Dad's, dropped in to visit. He had worked at the Portneuf Medical Center for several years before he was called up to serve in Iraq. He met with Dr. Kraus and Dr. Francisco and went over all the tests and information. He spent some time with Daddy before Stephani and I arrived and he said that Daddy was with two of the finest doctors in the West. He concurred with their recommendations. I think his visit reaffirmed to all of us that we had good doctors whom we could trust.

Wednesday Daddy was informed that he would be moved out of the ICU on the second floor and into a regular private room. Just before moving, he requested that he be allowed to shower. He had been brushing his teeth and shaving in the ICU but had not had a shower since arriving on Sunday. I asked the nurse if I could help. When we tried to move him from the wheelchair to the shower stall, he had almost no strength in his legs. Just the exertion of that move got him coughing and he started coughing up blood. It was just one more sign to both of us that the cancer was progressing rapidly. We got him back to his hospital room but the shower had completely sapped his strength and he had a hard time getting warm and stable again. After he settled down the hospital staff moved him out of the ICU and up to the 4th floor into a regular hospital room. Dad's comment was, "One step closer to heaven."

Once Daddy was settled, Kathy and Dick and Stephani and I left for home. We knew that we had a lot of family coming and we made up a grocery list of what we would need to feed the bunch. That night Kathy and Stephani went through Daddy's file cabinet and located his Medicare Card and other documents that were of importance. Since Dick and Kathy had just recently been through the retirement scenario, it was very helpful to have them give me an idea of what I needed to do.

Late that night we got a call from Daddy at the hospital. He was very upset. He was supposed to have received some medications and he had talked to a nurse but nothing was happening. I could feel in his voice that he was about at the end of his patience. I got on the phone with the nurse's station, with the ICU, and anyone else that I thought could get things moving and soon he had his medication and was settling down for the night.

Thursday morning (January 29) we moved our king size bed downstairs and the box springs into the garage so that when hospice came, we could set up for Daddy in our master bedroom. When we arrived at the hospital about 9:30 we found Dad in an agitated state. He said that he couldn't breathe and couldn't convince the nurses that he needed more oxygen. Dr. Ben Call, the chief cardiologist, who is also a dear friend of Dad's, came to visit and Daddy complained to him about the oxygen. Dr. Call reached over and turned the valve and this brought a flood of oxygen and relief. Dad's comment to Ben was, "The nurses on this floor are all a bunch of idiots!" (This comment was so out of character for Daddy but it revealed his increasing agitation with his situation and his feeling of helplessness.) Ben visited and said that he had spent some time with Dr. Kraus and that he concurred with their prognosis. He counseled Daddy to spend the time he had left with his family.

Thursday morning both Shauntel and Becky arrived. It was so sweet to have them with us. Stephani left for home to get things ready for hospice to arrive. By midmorning, a constant stream of friends started to arrive. Our phones were ringing and it was like a whirlwind with all the activity swirling around Daddy.

Midmorning a resident who had been shadowing Dr. Kraus paid us a visit. He counseled Daddy to get his affairs in order in the time he had left. I reassured him that we had gone over all the details about the financial matters. This young doctor said that he wasn't talking about finances; he was talking about Daddy resolving any issues he might have with family members. All of us just looked at the resident and at each other and commented, "This man doesn't have any issues with anyone that we know of and especially not with his family!" That was a sweet tribute to Dad.

When Dr. Kraus came in, he checked Steve's chart and noted that the recent blood work was revelatory of Dad's condition. He said that in a normal sample of blood there is usually 10,000 platelets and in daddy's sample there was 100! On Wednesday he was using 2 liters of oxygen

and on Thursday morning he was at nearly 20! He said that they don't recommend sending a patient home with that much oxygen and wasn't sure hospice would agree. At that moment I saw a look in Daddy's eyes that was pleading, "Take me home, Sue. Take me home."

I asked Dr. Kraus if he felt I was doing Daddy any harm if we took him home and he said that I wasn't, but that he would need to be transported in an ambulance. We immediately visited with the hospice representative and he agreed to get hospice in motion for that afternoon. We knew how hard it was to get anything done very quickly in the hospital, but by about 3:00 the ambulance arrived and the rest of us cleared out Daddy's stuff and headed for home. Becky went straight to Rexburg to get SaraKay, and Shauntel and I rode together, arriving just seconds before the ambulance pulled into the yard. Stephani had cleared out our bedroom and all the equipment was in place. The hospice nurse was there as well as our dear friend and ward member, Cori Lopez, who works for hospice and volunteered to help us get Daddy settled. For four hours they oriented us. It was so intense; we realized that once they left, we would be on our own.

David, Mike, and Tim arrived very shortly after we got Daddy home. It was so comforting as each of the kids arrived. It didn't take them long to realize that Dad was deathly ill and unable to do much but lie in bed. After the hospice nurses left, each of us had some time with Dad. At one point we all knelt or sat around the bed and we talked about the events of the past few days and about memories. We stayed there with Daddy, visiting around his bedside. He wasn't able to do much talking. He was very restless at times and kept ripping off his oxygen mask. He wanted it cool in the room and the nurses advised us to open the window above his head. It was bitterly cold outside but we opened the window as wide as it would go and it seemed to help Daddy settle down a bit. We were all huddled in coats and blankets to keep warm but it was very sweet to be there with him. It was a cherished time together.

One of the things that was the most heart-wrenching to me was to see the grief in the children's eyes as they arrived and became a part of the ongoing drama. I wanted to lift from them this weight of sorrow and yet I realized that they were worrying about me as much as I was worrying about them. Although it was a sad situation, the sealing power of the priesthood was almost tangible and I felt a great comfort in knowing that the bonds that had kept us a family for 42 years would be strong enough to secure us for eternity if we lived worthy.

If it hadn't been for the sacrifices of the spouses, none of the kids would have been able to have been here for the days and hours before Daddy's death. I realized later that one aspect of the last day of Daddy's life that made it so very sweet and comforting was that it was very quiet and a spirit of reverence prevailed. The whole community was bringing food which relieved us from cooking and we focused on saying our goodbyes. I will be forever grateful to the extended families of our daughters and sons-in-law who did everything they could to give the children some time with their dad.

About 10 o'clock Thursday night we finished our "memories" session and decided it was time for bed. Someone mentioned that we ought to each take an hour throughout the night to be in the room with Daddy. SaraKay took the 10-11:00 hour and because I hadn't had any one-on-one time with her since her arrival home that afternoon, we sat by the bed and just visited about the last couple days at BYU-I. She had looked so teary when she arrived with Becky that I had assumed the worst, but her few days had actually been very sweet and spiritual. She commented that she had felt the power of the Comforter so strongly and been reassured that the Lord's will was being done.

Daddy continued to be restless and we put a cold compress on his forehead and gave him the morphine pills that the nurses had left with us. They were to calm him and we were told that we could give them to him whenever he needed them. I know that the pills helped him deal with the oxygen deprivation he was experiencing despite the two compressors that were feeding into his mask.

At about 11 o'clock, SaraKay and I got Tim to trade us off. All the children were in the dining area visiting; no one had gone to bed yet. Tim went in to be with Daddy. In a few minutes he called to me and I hurried back to the bedroom. Steve had tried to get out of bed to use the commode and Tim had been helping him. When I got to the room Daddy was not even aware of what he was doing and so we tried to get him back on the bed. I lifted from behind and Tim put his arms under Dad's armpits and we coached him to stand up so we could pivot him and get him back onto the bed. When we lifted Daddy up, he

fell forward into Tim's arms and it took every ounce of strength we both had to get him upright and by the bed. We told him to sit on the bed and he did this but he was situated by the foot board and we couldn't lay him out straight. We called in the rest of the children and we folded a sheet and tried to use the technique the nurses had taught us. I'm sure we were a rather comical sight with eight of us tugging and pulling and lifting to get Daddy positioned under the trapeze bar so that he could help us with the lifting. Finally, we got him correctly positioned in the bed and tucked in for the night.

This experience was hard on all of us. I think Daddy realized that he couldn't trust himself to know his limits and that getting in and out of the bed was not an option anymore. This experience made us all realize that I could not take care of him alone without some of the children being here with me. As we gathered in the hall, the children started planning when they would come, each taking a week and then trading off. SaraKay said that she would quit school and come home for the time I needed her. Tim, David, and Paul thought that they could work on their computers from here for as long as they were needed. We went to bed with heavy hearts and throughout the night took turns with Daddy.

When I awoke about 6:30 (January 30) I checked in and he was sleeping quietly. Throughout the morning he would occasionally say a word or two but for the most part he slipped into a quiet sleep. Before long, the doorbell started to ring and people started to arrive to visit. At first, we greeted them and a few we let into the bedroom to see Daddy, but it soon became obvious to us that this was really our family time and we didn't want it interrupted. No one really realized how sick he was and we were beginning to see that our time with him was going to be shorter than any of us had thought.

About 10 o'clock Dr. McKinley came. He came into the bedroom and assessed the situation. We told him of the drama of the night before and he suggested that a catheter be put in so that Daddy wouldn't feel like he had to get out of bed. He asked us if all the children were there and we said that John, Paul, and Jonie hadn't arrived yet but that John was the one we were most worried about since he hadn't seen Daddy for over a year. His plane was due to land in Pocatello at 9:00.

Dr. McKinley said that if we wanted Daddy alive to see John, that we would need to give him some liquids since his body was shutting down. We were in a quandary as to what to do because Steve and I had both signed a Living Will when we had our original will drafted a couple of years ago and agreed that we didn't want to be kept alive with feeding tubes or other heroic measures. Despite this, we finally decided that we would go ahead and have the nurse give him some liquids. When Shauntel mentioned via the phone to Randy that we were doing this, he told her that we would be setting him back by hydrating him this way. He was shutting down and to introduce these fluids would in essence be a setback for him. These words proved to be prophetic.

That afternoon Linds, Sam, and Josh arrived (Katie is teaching in China and unable to be here) and later Steve, Bonnie, and their family came. It was sweet to see the children gathered around the bed, trying to say something that would indicate to their grandpa just how much they loved him and appreciated all he had done for them. When Steve arrived, he brought with him about 40 pages of emails that had arrived from all over the country. The word had gotten out that Steve Larsen was very ill and fighting for his life; the response was overwhelming!

Since we all wanted to be at Daddy's side and yet we wanted it to be something that was meaningful for him, it was suggested that we read the pages of emails that Steve had collected. The nurses assured us that even if Daddy didn't seem to respond, that he was probably very much aware of what was going on and could hear us. We also gathered in family prayer and prayed that John would arrive safely and without incident before Daddy's passing.

We took turns reading the emails. Some of the accounts were spiritual, some encouraging, some humorous, and all full of praise for Daddy. It was a wonderful activity and occupied the better part of an hour. But then, true to Randy's prediction, as the fluids began to take effect, Daddy became restless and uncomfortable again.

Unbeknownst to me, while we had been gathered around the bed that afternoon, Bonnie's incision from her surgery two months before reopened and she felt the blood and infection soaking her clothes. She immediately got Steve. Shannon, Bonnie's sister, who lives a few miles from our home offered to take her to the emergency room at Bingham Memorial Hospital. She lined up for

the children to be taken care of at her home with her own five. It was such a sweet gesture and I know Steve will be forever grateful that he was able to be with Daddy the night he passed away.

Now began a time of waiting. The time seemed to crawl until John's plane would touch down. Then a phone call. The plane was delayed in Salt Lake and it would be 10 o'clock instead of 9 before it arrived. We were all so frustrated but knew that it was out of our hands. Daddy was becoming increasingly agitated and to keep him from ripping off his mask, we had one person on each side of the bed holding his hands. I sat by his head and when he would start tossing his head, I would stroke his face and whisper in his ear. We also turned on a Mormon Tabernacle Choir CD. That seemed to be the only way we could keep him calm. We stood around the bed and sang to him. We started with Primary songs, sang hymns, and ended with "And Here We Have Idaho!" (Of all songs!)

At about 9:15 Becky and Mike left for Pocatello to get John. We were continuing to give Daddy the morphine and one time I noticed that the pill hadn't been absorbed under his tongue and was coming out the side of his mouth. It was covered in blood.

I want to share some things about my mother's passing that I haven't mentioned before now. I was notified at about 3 a.m. that Grandma Ilene had died. Deniece said that she and Kathy, Dick and Don had been called about 9:30 p.m. and told that Grandma was slipping away. They all immediately left for the nursing home and Grandma was conscious when they got there. I had been under the impression that Grandma had just slipped away in their arms but such was not the case. She had a difficult passing and right up until the end she was gasping for breath and there was a death rattle in her chest. They kept telling her to let go but she just wouldn't and she struggled there in Kathy's arms for nearly three hours. When I went to the funeral home to help dress her for burial, Kathy and Deniece both commented how peaceful she looked compared to their last memories of her.

This has stayed in my mind and when I realized that Daddy was terminal, I wondered what he would have to go through to escape his body. I hated to think of him struggling for every breath and after seeing the blood on the morphine pill, I became even more apprehensive about his passing. I knew that we would probably all be near and I was especially worried that SaraKay would see some things that would haunt her in the years ahead.

At one point, as Tim mentioned in his life sketch at the funeral, Daddy's eyes opened a small way, his hand broke loose and he rolled on his side, facing me and gave me a huge hug. The kids mentioned later that the song, "How Firm a Foundation" was playing on the CD and the words to the last verse seemed especially meaningful to us. "The soul that on Jesus has leaned for repose; I will not, I cannot, desert to his foes; That soul though all hell should endeavor to shake; I'll never, no never, no never forsake!"

At that moment, with my tear-stained face pressed next to his, I whispered to him, "We love you. We love you." And then as if prompted by the Holy Ghost, I knew that there was something more that I should say. And I said it. "I love you. I love you. You have always been faithful to me!" Now to some this may not be a big difference but to Daddy and me it was significant. Being the father of a family of eleven was never easy, but Daddy was the kind of a guy who was willing to sacrifice almost everything he had to support me in mothering this big brood. He was very considerate of the pressures on me and never made me feel guilty for all the time and energy I spent on my "mothering," sometimes at his expense. He was so selfless that way. It was important for me to say one last time to him, "I love you!"

We continued our vigil. As Daddy calmed, we visited quietly around him. All at once, Tim said, "It's been 10 seconds since Dad took a breath. We all looked down at him and almost immediately he took another breath. Then nothing. My first thought was to grab him by the shoulders and shake him and say, "Steve, breathe!" But, someone, I don't know who, said, "Let him go!" We knew it was what we should do. And then it happened. It was as if from the top of his head, the color drained down his face, his body, and he became instantly grey. He looked waxen. The spirit was gone. In a most peaceful and soft way, he had escaped and was (I am quite sure) in the arms of his mother and father, with my mom and dad waiting in the wings.

I don't remember exactly what was said then, only that Steve and Tim took note of the time (9:52 pm) and we discussed what to do. The hospice nurses had told us to call them when we needed them, but the last thing we wanted was any one

intruding on our last hours with Daddy. We just stood around until someone heard Becky, Mike and John pull into the driveway. It was about 10:20.

I met them at the front door, John coming in on the run. We hugged and by the time Becky and Mike followed him in, we told them that Daddy was gone. Mike seemed especially shocked at the news. John said, "It's okay, he's not gone yet." We all walked back into the bedroom and stood around the bed, visiting quietly. We felt that John needed some time with Dad alone, but before we left, we had family prayer with John as voice. Then we left so he could say his goodbyes.

I called the hospice nurse and asked if we could have some more time with Dad before Perry came to take his body to the funeral home. She said that it was our choice and so we told her to have them come at 11:30. It was sweet to be in the room with Daddy. It was so peaceful and serene and none of us wanted to ever forget what we were feeling.

At 11:30 our dear friends, Perry Hawker and Ryan Tew, arrived. They came into the bedroom, met the children, and we visited quietly about Daddy's passing. Perry had been to a high school ball game earlier in the evening and he told us that no one was watching the game. Everyone was talking about Steve Larsen and how they were praying for a miracle for our family. He went on to tell us incident after incident of why he had such admiration for Daddy.

About midnight I asked Perry if he and Ryan would like to join us for family prayer. We knelt there around the bed and ask the Lord to bless Perry and Ryan as they cared for our precious Dad and husband. We prayed for those in the family who would be traveling to come to the funeral and especially those who would be flying without their mates. We prayed that the Comforter would bless us and help us accept this as the Lord's will.

When we were through, we visited for a few minutes about when we would want the funeral and they confirmed that Wednesday would work for them. We helped Perry and Ryan get Daddy on a gurney and into their vehicle. I think when Dad's body left the house that it left us all feeling empty. Maybe Daddy felt that way, too. We continued visiting until the wee hours of the morning and eventually we all went to bed.

The next morning, we were scheduled to meet with Perry at the funeral home. While Shauntel, John, and Steve, and I went to the mortuary, those here at home dismantled all the hospice equipment, took down Christmas lights, and put the master bedroom back together. It was such a comfort to me that it was all back in order by the time we arrived home about noon. While we were at the funeral home, we went over the details of the funeral program, selected a casket, and agreed to email pictures and a proofed copy of the printed program. This whole process was simplified by Daddy's directions a few days earlier when he outlined what he wanted.

While meeting with Perry I asked if it would be possible for the sons to dress Dad for burial in his temple clothes. Perry hesitated and then admitted that the night before when he and Ryan had gotten Dad's body and returned to the funeral home, they hadn't felt right about leaving him the way he was and so at that late hour they had washed and prepared his body and had dressed him in his temple clothes. He asked if we would like to see him and he directed us to a room on the upper level of the home. Dad's body was lying on a flat bed with his head propped up and he looked so peaceful and happy. It looked like he was on the verge of smiling. Perry commented that he looked so good because his body hadn't gone through the trauma that a lot of people do in death.

I noticed right away that Daddy's hair was too long around the ears and that his eyebrows were looking a little disheveled. I asked Perry if I could cut his hair and freshen him up a bit and Ryan brought in a pair of clippers, scissors, and a cloth to protect his temple clothes while I worked on him. It was a sweet experience to have that time with Daddy and we really spiffed him up. We scheduled a time to have the boys come in and get him in his temple robes and Steve suggested that we wait late enough in the day so that Paul could join us. Perry agreed and we left for home.

By the time we arrived home the house was full of company: friends, family, neighbors, ward members, and others. The food was arriving by the armloads and Marci and Jenny were doing all they could to keep track of dishes, keep things cold (the freezer in the garage was piled high with food) and keep the mess cleaned up. Bishop Goodwin and Cordon Wray paid a visit and talked through the funeral program. Bishop offered to notify those on the program and take care of all those kinds of details. Joanne Tominaga came and we retreated to a quiet bedroom where we could talk through our family's needs for the

funeral luncheon. We had had so many hams brought to the house already that we told her that we would provide the meat for the meal if she would line up the potatoes, salads, and desserts. She was so accommodating.

Soon Paul and Jenny arrived and we sat for lunch rehearsing with them and Marci all the events of the previous days. Staff arrived and we all gathered around the table, enjoying the feast provided by loving community members, and relishing the time together. I was so grateful for this time. Those just arriving had missed much of the preceding events and yet we all wanted them to know what had happened and feel the sweet things we had experienced.

I felt that each child brought with them a gift for me. Stephani and Steve helped me get through the initial shock. They got the word out and answered calls. Stephani and Kathy organized Daddy's desk so we had the right paper work and were able to navigate the important financial matters that needed to be addressed while Daddy was still able to talk to us. David and Stephani continued to work to help me get a grasp on the financial end of things. David had enlarged pictures of Dad and me and of each family and brought those with him to hang on the bedroom wall where Daddy would be able to see them and gain strength. Steve, John, and Paul helped with all the computer business. All the kids helped put the funeral program brochure together, sorting through pictures, poems, and gathering information. Mike arranged for flights for Jonie and kept that dialogue going until we had her situated. Becky helped with transporting SaraKay and John and both she and Shauntel took notes of Daddy's medications and hospice care, working with the nurses to insure we knew what we were supposed to do for his comfort. All helped with the kitchen work, greeted guests, protected me from the crowds. Some made phone calls to notify distant friends of Daddy's passing. John, Jenny, Paul, Mike, and Marci stayed up half the night gathering pictures and making a video to be shown at the viewing. They poured over scrapbooks and photo albums and produced a wonderful video.

A special mention needs to be made of Gary and Linda who not only came to the hospital to visit but who dropped by the house with armloads of food and offers of help. It was a rather sweet moment when Gary came in the front door and Mike and Marci's daughter, Amber, came running past the hall, stopped, looked up at Gary and ran into the dining room saying, "Grandpa, Grandpa!" It took some explaining but we all could understand how she could make that mistake because many people in the community still get them confused!

A similar situation developed shortly after Shauntel's children arrived. Archie was with me in the living room and most of the group was in the dining area visiting with Staff and Coco who had just arrived. Archie said to me, "I know that Grandpa is dead, but my mom's dad is right there in the other room visiting!" I realized that he thought Staff was Daddy. We had some explaining to do again.

Saturday, late afternoon we went in to the funeral home to dress Steve in his temple robes. It was very special to have all the sons a part of that. I was grateful that Steve suggested we wait until Paul arrived before going in. I would like to quote a letter he wrote to a dear friend in Wisconsin who had written to him expressing his sympathy. Paul wrote:

Mike, I feel so blessed to have you as a friend. Your kind and tender words have touched my heart and brought tears to my eyes. Thank you so much for taking the time to share your love and thoughts with me. Mike, you have always been such a kind and generous friend. Thank you for overlooking my weakness and always seeing the good in me.

Your words have me thinking about my dad and I thought I would share a thought with you. One of the most memorable experiences of the past several weeks was when I first saw my dad. We had rushed home to Idaho from Michigan but by the time we arrived Saturday afternoon, Dad had already passed away. He passed away Friday night. I was the last of the family to arrive. All ten siblings were there and it was very peaceful. After I arrived, we all sat around the dining room table and shared our experiences of the previous week. It was comforting to see the Lord's hand in the events and realize that it really was God's will that Dad should leave this mortal life at this time. Later, I went with my mom and five brothers to the funeral home and saw Dad. At first, I was hesitant to touch him, but I saw how tenderly my mom would touch his face and chest. They let me have some time alone with him. It's of course hard to express the feeling of that moment, but I think the best word to describe what I felt was gratitude. I put my hand on my dad's big, strong chest, and thought about how he had labored all

his life to support my mom and our family and to set a good example. I thought about his body and how he had used his body to provide for me and bless my life. As I touched Dad's familiar but lifeless body, the only words I could think to say through the tears were, "Thank you. Thank you, Dad. Thank you."

I hope you don't mind me sharing such a personal experience with you, but I trust you and know you will appreciate it. Plus, we are both dads and this experience has driven home to me the fact that at the end of the day, what really matters is that we are faithful to our spouse, our family, and to our God, and that we use our body to serve them."

SaraKay asked about going in with us to the funeral home and her brothers thought it would be sweet for her to have some understanding of the temple robes. We explained them to her since she is the only one who hasn't been endowed.

Saturday evening most of the kids returned home to help their families get ready for the funeral. Those who stayed were Paul and Jenny, Mike and Marci (who had brought over the girls Saturday from Burley), John, and Stephani. Jenny's parents had the three older children so she and Paul arrived with little Daniel in arms and were such a help. I was so grateful for all the kids during this hectic time. They answered the door, took phone calls, accepted food, and kept it organized so we didn't waste any, and kept the household running smoothly.

Marci had not planned to stay and had only brought one Sunday outfit but she could see the need and offered to stay through and help. One morning I noticed that she was going about her work in the kitchen in a very odd outfit. When I inquired, I discovered that all her clothes were in the washer and she was in her pajamas until things got washed and dried. What a trooper!

By Sunday morning I was wondering if we were going to be able to get the funeral program ready. I didn't want the many guests and phone calls to keep us from preparing carefully. We all wanted the funeral to be a good representation of Daddy and what his life stood for. Stephani suggested that she and I stay home from our meetings and try to collect ourselves and our thoughts after the whirlwind of activity the preceding days. Paul and Jenny, Mike and Marci, and John all attended and said that it was sweet to be with the ward and feel of their loving support. Following the block, the ward held a meeting in the cultural hall and ended their combined fast with a prayer asking for a spirit of comfort to attend our family in the times ahead.

At home Stephani and I went over the details of the coming week and just before she left to go back to Logan we sat at the computer and started reminiscing about Daddy and his life. It seemed like the words just started flowing and within a very short while Stephani had lots of notes for her life sketch.

Tim composed his half of the life sketch by Sunday night. He emailed it to us and we worked it over and refined it. Paul was a major player in this and carefully crafted the words to portray the things we felt were important. By Sunday evening Stephani had also transmitted hers and Paul edited and refined it.

One of the people that I had the children notify of Daddy's passing was Elder John Carmack, an emeritus member of the First Quorum of Seventy. Steve had served as his counselor in the Boise Idaho Mission Presidency years before. At the time the children notified him, he told them that he and his wife, Shirley sent their condolences but would probably be unable to attend.

On Monday morning as we were getting the finalized program ready to transmit to the funeral home, the phone rang and it was Elder Carmack. He said that he and Shirley would be coming and that he would like to take a few minutes on the program. He told me to notify the stake president that he would be presiding and therefore would also be the last speaker at the funeral. This was all very unnerving to me. I didn't understand the protocol but I did just as I was told and we notified our Bishop who called President Jenks and we also rearranged the program to make those changes. It was such an honor for President Carmack to come and to speak and we all appreciated his willingness to put other concerns aside for the day to be here with us.

Laurel brought the four children from Michigan on the plane alone without John's assistance. We all worried about her and made it a matter of prayer that all would go well with her flights. Tessa had been hesitant to be up in the air so high but she did great on the trip and could be seen later around the house pulling behind her the rolling backpack that housed her trip "essentials." John left on Tuesday to go get Laurel and the children from the Salt Lake airport. Jonie's flight also came in to Salt Lake City but she chose to rent a car so that she would be able to get back to the airport

early Thursday morning to make her flight out. We appreciated all her efforts to be with us!

One of the things that we asked Perry Hawker about was the possibility of the grandchildren having some time on Tuesday afternoon to view their grandpa's body. I felt like this would give them each some closure and maybe a more intimate setting in which to say their goodbyes. I knew that the viewing on Tuesday night would be so busy and just wouldn't give them the time they might want with Dad. Perry agreed and so as the families arrived on Tuesday, they went to the funeral home and had a special time there.

On Tuesday (February 3) afternoon Jeanie and Scot arrived from Show Low, AZ. They dropped in to visit before attending the viewing that night and we had a wonderful visit. I was so grateful for that opportunity since that evening and the day of the funeral there just wasn't any time for one-on-one exchanges with Steve's or my siblings who had all come so far to be a part of this occasion.

By later that afternoon all the children and their families had arrived and we hosted a meal here for everyone before the viewing that evening. Joyce Orton and Linda Lyon from Kesler's who had worked with SaraKay before she left for college offered to babysit the younger children here at the house during the viewing. I knew it would be a long and crowded night and so we arranged for the grandchildren to play here while the rest of the family attended the viewing.

That night was a sweet experience for all of us, including Steve's siblings who mingled and visited as people came and went. Many families, ward members, friends, and fellow scouters came to pay homage to Steve. Some who came were anxious to visit with our children who had been friends over the years with theirs. The viewing was scheduled to start at 7:00 but the people were already waiting when we arrived shortly after six and the line continued until about 9:30. It was a great tribute to Steve.

That night we had families sleeping in every room in the house. The Acevedo's offered their home for any of the family that needed a place and Paul and Jenny and their children and Tim stayed there. The Seely's and Bennions stayed at a motel and Steve and kids with Doug and Shannon. Several parents of the in-laws babysat the grandchildren and facilitated our situation. We were overwhelmed by people's goodness and their sensitivity to our needs.

Gary and Linda again did yeoman service in providing a "Bed and Breakfast" for the Larsen clan; Staff and Coco and her baby, Mark, Rita, Jeff, Jessica, Jeanie and Scott, Garon, and Karen, Jim, Teresa and Josh Vanfleet. All of Gary and Linda's children attended the funeral except Ryan who lives in Texas; Emily, Garon, Mindy and Roger, Ashley, and even Lisa and her two boys who flew in from Albuquerque, New Mexico! Rick and Terry, Amanda and Ryan, Aubrey and John, and Jonathon also attended. Jacob and Tanessa were unable to come because they are in a graduate program in Florida. Janette and Josh Watson drove from Jerome to be here and Alva Lu drove up from St. George to be here for us. It was so wonderful to feel everyone's loving support!

Those of my family who were here for the funeral were Charles and Brenda (Moscow, Idaho); Nate and Maureen, their daughter Marlayne (Billings, Montana) and Chad and Trish (Rexburg); Kathy and Dick (Salt Lake City) and Layne and Leslie with little Maren, and Deniece and Carolee (Kaysville) were here. My sister, Lisa, was unable to come but called and expressed her condolences.

Prior to the funeral the grandchildren practiced their musical number in the Primary room at the stake center while some of the kids and I greeted friends at the viewing prior to the services. It was very touching before closing the casket to get to say our last goodbyes before David offered a beautiful family prayer.

Following the family prayer, we all went in for the service. The chapel, cultural hall and stage were all filled to capacity. It was a touching sight! (A dear friend, President Arnold Dance estimated the audience to number 1400.) We all felt good about the service. The song, "Called to Serve" was so beautiful with all of Steve's brothers, Scott, and our six sons singing. The grandchildren also did a great job with the instrumental and obbligato to "I Am a Child of God." We all felt like Dad would have been happy with how everything went. Stephani and Tim's life sketches were personal and touching. President Kirkham, President Jenks, Bishop Goodwin, and President Carmack all did so well. President Carmack's remarks were a fitting climax to the service

Following the service, the Cedar Badge boys lined the sidewalk forming an arch with the "Flags of Freedom." As we left the chapel we walked beneath these flags. It was so beautiful and brought a lump to my throat. Equally impressive

was the ceremony performed at the graveside by the Cedar Badge leadership as they presented me with a beautiful American flag. Karen commented on the Flags of Freedom: "I was overwhelmed by the support and love shown to Steve and you. I think of those Cedar Badge kids getting out of school and traveling throughout the council...to be there to pay their last respects in such a memorable way. That was the most magnificent and meaningful to me of all who attended."

The ward provided a luncheon for the family following the graveside service. It was sweet to spend the time with the extended family and visit over dinner. We appreciated all the work and sacrifices of the ward members who volunteered their time and energies for us that day. Karen commented, "Another thought I had was at the luncheon afterwards. All the food was so obviously lovingly prepared...delicious slow cooked roast and layered Jell-O salads that take hours to make. I felt that even the people who fed us showed us their love and respect by giving us the very best of their time!"

By that evening, most of the family had left for home. SaraKay left for Rexburg, the Seely's caught their flight to Phoenix, the Andersons and Bennions returned to Logan, and Steve and kids returned to Wellsville. Later, those who remained had a good visit with Jonie and caught up on the news of her family. Although it had been years since we had seen her, it was as if the years melted away and she was a part of the family circle again.

Early the next morning Jonie left for Salt Lake and later that morning Dave and Andrea, Tim, and Mike and Marci left. On Friday Jenny drove our van and dropped off John and Laurel and their children at Laurel's sister, Karen's house in Salt Lake where they stayed until their flights on Saturday.

Jenny stayed at her parents in Bountiful until Sunday when Paul and I met her midway in Tremonton and we swapped cars and said our goodbyes. Paul had been with me Friday night and Saturday and we had attended a temple session Saturday morning together which was very sweet. We were able to be in the prayer circle together. On Sunday, he accompanied me to church and then we left for Utah. I so appreciated having the kids leave in shifts. The house didn't seem quite so lonely.

Since the funeral, people in the community, extended family, members of my ward, and all the kids have been so kind and good to me. It doesn't seem real yet that Steve is really gone. It seems like any minute he is going to come walking through the back door, briefcase in hand, and sit down with me for a good visit over supper. I think his spirit lingers but my widow friends tell me that soon I will feel that he has gone on and I am at last alone. I don't look forward to that day but I do think that he has a work to do on the other side and I have a work to do here and we will both need to get about our business. I know he loves me and that he will be aware of me and the family, especially when there are times of suffering and need. Thank goodness for the gospel and for the hope it gives us for a grand reunion.

My love to each of you. Your loving (and continuing) support is how our family will get through this time of sadness. I know each of you are dealing with your own bittersweet times and I have to be grateful since none of us would be suffering if our love for Dad wasn't so strong. Mom

[Family prayer given before closing the casket by David Larsen]

Our dear Father in Heaven,

We feel so grateful for the life of this dearly beloved man, Stephen Allan Larsen. We are thankful that we were able to gather around him this past week and feel of his spirit, as well as the spirits of ministering angels and of the Holy Ghost before his parting. We are grateful for the Comforter, which abides with us still, and testifies to our souls of the truthfulness of the plan of salvation, which thou hast so lovingly given us.

We thank thee for Jesus Christ and his victory over sin and death. We thank thee for the sealing ordinance and promise of forever families if we live true to the covenants we have made.

We thank thee for blessing us with this man, who has served devotedly as an instrument in thy hands in many roles professionally and in the Church. We are thankful for the faithful service he has given within the Larsen family as brother, son, father, and grandfather. We especially feel grateful for his commitment to and love for his precious wife as her husband and sweetheart. We thank thee for the legacy he leaves of faith, service, testimony, and love that we felt from him

while he was living, and which we feel inspired to carry with us still.

We thank thee that Dad patterned his life after the Savior's and in so doing moved those who knew him to do the same.

Dear Father,

We ask thee to continue to bless us with thy Spirit. Please bless those who feel a deep void that they may be filled and comforted. We pray for an added measure of peace to distill upon the heart and mind of Dad's eternal companion, who thankfully continues her mortal mission with us here on this earth.

We pray for our dear father, that he may feel joy in reuniting with his mother, and father and other loved ones beyond the veil. We ask thee to bless him with joy in his new assignment in the spirit world. Please bless his spirit to be comforted as he continues his next mission without his earthly companion at his side.

Please bless all of us to continue Dad's

legacy of faith, service, testimony, and love. Please bless us to pattern our lives after our Savior, Jesus Christ, even as our dear father has done, that when our own earthly mission is complete, we may return home to his and thy sweet embrace. In the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.

[Stephani's life sketch] *If you've ever been in Steve Larsen's office at home, you know that symbols were very important to him. If I had to pick a symbol that represents my dad, it would be a mountain. Not because he was a mountain of a man or because he loved the mountains, although both of those things are true—and not because Mom would sometimes call him a "mountain of molten muscle." No, I think of him as a mountain because of his stability and steadfastness and his faithfulness in living according to principles that he cherished.*

This mountain man, Steve Larsen, was born December 8, 1943 in Idaho Falls, Idaho to Allan and Barbara Larsen. He passed away on January 30th at home. He is survived by his wife, Susan, siblings Gary, Stafford, Jeannie, Mark, Rick, Karen, 11 children and 35 grandchildren. Dad grew up in a large and happy family and worked on the family farm. He attended Snake River schools and was involved playing the trumpet in band during high school. This love of music would continue throughout his life. After graduation he served faithfully in the Central British Mission. He attended Ricks College, where he met mom, Susan Richards. He said that from the moment he saw her, he knew she was the one for him. In fact, he was more certain than she was. After they had been dating for a while, he began talking about marriage. She reminded him that he hadn't proposed and even said, "I don't know if I love you." His confident response was, "Yes, you do, you just don't know it." They were married in the Idaho Falls Temple on March 4, 1966.

After finishing at Ricks College, Dad and Mom moved to Provo to continue his education at BYU. Five years and four children later, they left Provo with an MBA in hand for a job with Olsen Farms in Washington. Dad often said, "I thought if we stayed at BYU any longer, they would have named a building after me."

After working as a business manager for several years, Dad and Mom decided to return to Idaho to farm with his dad. This was a new lifestyle for the family, living on a farm with the wide-open spaces. They built a home and as a family we thrived on the wonderful life of sprinklers and sunsets and fields of wheat. Our family loved having Dad close by and worked with him rolling bales of hay, picking rock, and working in spud harvest. This was a sweet time for our family as we added four more sons and a Native American foster daughter. I can directly attribute my dislike of driving to an experience during this time—I was about 11 when Dad put me on a tractor and after pointing out the clutch, gas, brake, and 10 gears, asked me to drive it to the other farm. When he returned an hour later, I was still within sight, since I hadn't been able to get the tractor out of 2nd gear and was traveling about four miles an hour.

Dad was called as the bishop of Moreland 2nd Ward and loved the people of this ward; it was one of the sweetest times in his life. One time Mom asked him "How can you bear the demands and pressures?" He answered that from the moment he was ordained as bishop, he was blessed with an overflowing feeling of love for every member of the ward and that these feelings sustained him. The ward members were good to our family. We would traipse in each Sunday, all 10 of us, and sit on the 2nd bench where Dad could give us the evil eye if we got out of control. It was during this time that our family got to know many immigrant farm workers in our area and under Dad's direction a Spanish missionary class

was formed that eventually became a Spanish branch.

In 1978 Dad began selling insurance to supplement his farm income and eventually realized he couldn't do both careers. He left farming and went into financial planning and the insurance industry. With this change came many changes for our family, including building a new home "in town", his release as bishop, and a call to serve in the Boise Idaho Mission presidency with President John Carmack. The Idaho Mission stretched from Jackson Hole to Boise and Dad, as a counselor, was the liaison for this end of the mission. These were days never to be forgotten. He met many wonderful people, stayed in homes of stake presidencies, attended conferences, and loved this calling. Perhaps the only downside was an occasional speeding ticket when he had a van full of missionaries.

After this he had various other callings: high councilor, primary teacher, 11-year-old scout leader, and stake YM President. Our family was blessed and happy to live in an area surrounded by kind neighbors and a sweet ward. Mom and Dad have loved living here. About eight years ago Dad was called to be a counselor to President DeVaughn Shipley in the Blackfoot NW stake presidency. He loved this calling also. His favorite part was interviewing for temple recommends. He said, "It's a sacred and cherished thing to be able to see into people's souls and see the goodness there—it's hallowed ground."

Dad's dedication to church work was absolute and was evidenced not only in his church callings but also how he led our family. He was born to be a dad—He became one nine months after getting married and sent off his youngest child to college just three weeks before passing away. He faithfully read his scriptures in the early morning and was diligent in giving father's blessings, holding family home evening, and presiding at family prayer. He taught us to work by working with us, whether it was weeding the garden, hauling wood for the wood-burning stove, or mowing the lawn. He even taught us about car maintenance, like rolling down the old Toyota's windows with a wrench in the spring and rolling them back up with the wrench in the fall. He was devoted to Mom, always opening the door for her; often we'd catch them holding hands. We'd all moan whenever we put up the Christmas mistletoe because we knew what was coming next and sure enough, he'd give her a big smack.

It's not easy to have a household of 10 kids and all the associated chaos, but Dad could drive a 12-passenger van full of kids with all their noise. He'd just pass back the Chocolate Whoppers and tune it all out. There were only a few signs that he may have needed a little space to himself. One was the occasional box of grape nuts he bought that we knew were just for him, and the other was his tendency to buy candy and hide it in his dresser drawer.

His commitment to his family was also evidenced in his involvement in scouting as his sons came of age. 18 Pinewood Derby cars and many years of scouting activities and service projects later, Dad saw all his sons get their Eagles. He was called to be the Blackfoot District Scouting Chairman and during this time became heavily involved in the broader scouting community and adult leadership. In 1993 he was approached by Brad Allen and was recruited to be the Endowment Director for the newly formed Grand Teton Council. This job was a perfect fit for Dad because of his commitment to building youth, his love of the outdoors, and his love of scouting. He truly believed that the future of our nation was dependent on our youth, that Scouting was the tool to prepare youth to lead our country, and that Scouting was in place to help fulfill the Lord's purposes. This career brought Dad immense personal satisfaction and lasting friendships. He loved the people he rubbed shoulders with, from the ward scout leaders and his fellow professionals, to the Tiger Ear volunteers and many generous donors.

This job also fit well with another aspect of Dad's personality—his love of education and learning. He inherited a love of reading from his mother, devouring novels and books on self-improvement. He memorized poems and quotes and loved good music. Every year when the new orchestra season would start, he would bemoan the fact that, as a trumpet player, his lips weren't in shape. Mom would beg to differ with this but one day, as he was complaining, SaraKay said, "Well, maybe it would help if you would practice more like you have told the rest of us to!" He did encourage us all to practice and he sat through a lot of recitals and practice sessions but he never complained. He was immensely proud of his children and their accomplishments, although he would occasionally get frustrated with lost tools, sticky steering wheels, or misplaced fingernail clippers.

Paul reminded us of a time that illustrated Dad's patience. In a letter to Dad, Paul wrote, "One day our chimney became plugged so you shut down our wood burning stove. Being the great son that I was, I noticed the stove wasn't running so I decided to carry out the unpopular task of getting a fire going. After doing so, I retreated to my room in the basement and closed the door. Later, I remember the door flying open and your head popped in along with billows of smoke. Your eyes were red and bloodshot from the smoke and you asked, "Did YOU start the fire?" You informed me about the plugged chimney but unfortunately our house was already full of smoke. I remember that, despite the frigid winter weather, we opened all the doors and windows and were crawling along the floor, coughing, and trying to breath. It was a crazy experience but somehow, I think everyone realized in the moment how funny it was. My brother Tim remarked, "I remember that night. I came upstairs and Dad was sitting in his chair, smoke floating above his head and he was trying to read a book."

Just 18 years ago SaraKay arrived in our home—the last of the children. She has helped to keep Dad and Mom young by keeping them involved in the community and focused on parenting. She was a late but cherished addition. Dad and Mom have had some wonderful opportunities just in the past few years to travel together. Some have asked if Dad regretted that he didn't get to serve another mission but he and Mom for 2 ½ years served as ward mission leaders and have felt great satisfaction in that work. Dad's life has been one of commitment and sacrifice. With regard to Dad's diagnosis of terminal leukemia, someone asked, "Did he express any resentment?" and the answer was no. He wasn't resentful about the cancer—he was simply concerned about Mom and her well-being and wanted to express his love to his family and friends.

In closing may I mention on more thing about my father, the mountain. In the scriptures, mountains are holy places—places where you see the Lord. This past week our family has felt that we were on holy ground. We have seen the hand of the Lord and felt his tender mercies. Dad mentioned that he felt sustained by the hundreds of prayers being offered on his behalf, as we all did.

I am grateful for this man, this mountain of a man who loved the Lord, loved his country, and loved his family. His life's work is only beginning for so many of the things that mattered to him are being carried on by his children and grandchildren. I give thanks for his life and for the sweetness of the Lord that has blessed us all.

[Tim's life sketch] Ten minutes is not enough time to cover all aspects in the life of a Renaissance man! But, as Dad would say, "Greetings and hallucinations!" My mom approached me and said, Tim, your relationship with your Dad is special—I would like you to give the life sketch." I had to chuckle inside because isn't that how we all have felt, both family and friends? We could all give a tribute to him because he connected with every one of us in a unique way. Dad's life sketch was written by me and you. Over the past week, we have received countless emails, notes, calls, and visits that have brought home to us the breadth and scope of the relationships that defined his life.

The night Dad passed on, a few of us kids went into his office. David remarked, This office is a microcosm of Dad's life! Just sitting in here, we can see what his life was all about." As I looked around, I realized just how true that statement was. Today I'd like to share with you a little about Dad's office. One of the first things I noticed was his bookshelf. Dad loved reading. A note from his daughter recalled:

Quote: "Imagine driving down a country road, rural enough that there are no lines on the road. You're going about 65 mph and feel very safe in the driver's care because the driver is your dad. But wait, he's reading a novel as he's driving!"

Many of us know how much he enjoyed exercise. His daily bike rides were coupled with his mental exercise. As he rode his bike he would memorize flash cards he created from things he had read. He had a reservoir of inspiring quotes. An example of how he used them occurred the Sunday after his own father's death. Dad wanted to thank the nursing home residents for their kindness to his father so he arose in their testimony meeting and off the cuff recited the poem, "Thank you for enough hellos to get me through the last good-bye." His mind was filled with so many positive things; we couldn't help but be lifted by him.

The next things I observed in Dad's office were 8 eagles, four bugles, and a figurine of Baden Powell. It seemed one of Dad's proudest statements was, "I have six sons and they are all eagles." I assumed he was referring to the scout rank, but I know now what eagles and scouting

represent to my Dad—being your very best and soaring as high as you can.

In just that small office it is notable that there are three pictures of Christ, several scriptures, and a plaque with his priesthood line of authority. Dad's first priority was his relationship with God—that's how he was able to lead and inspire so many of us. The largest painting in his office depicts George Washington kneeling near his horse and praying, which demonstrates both the patriotism Dad felt and also the way he led—through reliance on God. One son wrote,

Quote: "You have been an amazing example of leading the family in family prayer. It seems like we always knelt around the piano bench and prayed in the morning. I like it when you prayed because I could feel the sincerity and power of your words as you prayed for each family member and spoke with Heavenly Father. I think your relationship with God has been such that you are able to speak with Him sincerely."

Dad also faithfully led the family in Family Home Evening. We all remember with fondness the way he began each Family Home Evening, saying with a smile, "Welcome to Hamily Fome Evening!" Then, as the rest of us rolled our eyes, he would add, "Whoops…I got my mords wixed."

Sitting at his desk, I also saw two pictures of our family. By putting God first in his life, Dad was able to love and lead his children. One of his sons shared the following:

Quote: "Thanks for teaching me how to work, how to laugh(even if it sometimes involved puns,) how to study, how to look at life positively, how to pray, how to sing, how to share, how to open doors for others, how to treat my wife, how to lead, how to use the priesthood, and how to love."

As a family we believe his greatest mission was to be the patriarch of our family and we know that he honorably fulfilled this mission.

A final thing I noticed on Dad's desk was a poster with the statement, "Return with Honor." A neighbor's note to him read:

Quote: "The past few months when I would see Steve I would think, "That man glows. His countenance is so beautiful." Now I know why. He was preparing to return to his Savior."

The Lord gave him one last gift as his time came to a close. He was blessed with timely and accurate information from doctors so that those he loved could gather to say one last hello to get him through the last good-bye.

And we all knew Dad's true love and sweetheart was Mom. He believed she was an angel and told us so. He seemed to beam and walk proudly when he held her hand. As his daughter-in-law wrote to him, "Yours is a beautiful union." The culminating action of his life came about an hour before he passed away. He seemed restless. My mother sat near him, stroking his cheek to calm him. The twins each stood at his side, gently holding his hands to restrain him from taking off his uncomfortable oxygen mask. Finally one of the twins released his hand and for the first time in about 12 hours his eyes cracked open and he reached over and embraced my mom. My brother could hear my mom whispering in his ear. "I love you. I love you. You have always been faithful to me."

I think all of us felt the same sentiment as we tried to say goodbye. Dad affected us so deeply that words haven't quite been sufficient. It was a blessing to have time to gather; to approach him, to thank him, and to make promises to him. What I have determined, however, is that the best tribute we can give our dad is to be an extension of what we saw in him—inclusion, and kindness to others, a commitment to duty, and an abiding faith and hope in the Lord. Words may not express the gratitude and love we feel for you, Dad. But, maybe our actions can. We love you, Dad

March 17, 2009

When John called today, he asked me when I was going to write a family letter. I realized that I had been avoiding it. I have avoided most things that remind me of Daddy because it is just too painful to think about him being gone. I really have tried hard to look on the bright side of being a widow, if there is a bright side. I have found a few advantages, though. Let me name one that I just thought of today. I didn't have to wear green today because there was no one around to pinch me. Another advantage is that I can watch whatever show I want to watch on TV, although Daddy and I usually only watched one show and so that was usually not an issue. Well, that's it. That's my list for now. Hopefully I will be able to identify other "pluses" but for now I can't think of any.

Last week was very busy and special. The youth in the ward held a dinner for all of us singles and elderly. The young men were in charge and I

offered to help so I ended up cooking the meat (pork roast) and providing a game for the program. I typed up a list of statements about each person who was expected to attend the event (both the youth and the older folks) and we read down through them and tried to guess who they described. It was a hoot! Let me give you a few examples. I got this information from phoning each person and asking them to give me a little-known fact of themselves. Here are a couple of examples:
1. I spent most of my mission in jail (Liberty Jail that is)? Shelda Belnap
2. I was the jacks champion of my fifth-grade class. Nolan Furniss
3. I was born at home. Marcus Tominaga
4. I was a boxing champion in my younger years. Lynn Wolfley
As you can imagine, we all enjoyed getting better acquainted and also got some good laughs at each other's expense.

On Thursday night Daddy was honored at the Blackfoot District Recognition Night with the Distinguished Service Award. The district leadership invited me to attend the event and then presented me with an eagle's head statue that is just beautiful. It was very touching and I was so grateful for the honor.

On Tuesday morning about eight I got a phone call from Dad's boss, Clarke Farrer, who was at a meeting in Blackfoot and wondered if he could come visit me for a few minutes. When he arrived, he had David Hermansen (Council President), Mark Nelson, and one other professional that I didn't know with him. They all came in and told me that on April 18th at the Grand Teton Council's Recognition Night they wanted to present Daddy with the Grand Teton Hall of Fame award. The Council gives out two of these a year and they said that everyone agreed that he should be one of the recipients. It will be held in the Snake River High School auditorium at 6:30 and following the ceremony, they will have a place in the commons for me to stand and greet guests. Clarke gave me 10 tickets and invited any of my children to attend who wanted to. So, I am extending this invitation and need to hear back from you if you can come and if I need to get more tickets. Clarke suggested that one of my children could escort me on stage when they present the award. I know it will be a special night but I don't want the Boise bunch to worry about coming since we will be together the previous weekend for Chantelle's big birthday/baptism event. No one needs to feel obligated. Do what works for you.

One of the things I have done each week since Daddy died is to attend the temple. It is such a special place and it has given me a lot of peace. Sometimes I invite others to go with me but mostly I just go alone so I can have time to ponder. Brenda Godfrey told me that after Lyle died, she could feel him near her whenever she attended the temple. I feel a peaceful feeling but I feel closer to Daddy here in our home than anywhere else. I draw such strength from this home and continue to feel supported in this trial.

On Sunday I met Steve and some of his children in Brigham City and we drove together to Dick and Kathy's ward building to attend their farewell. All of their family was there and Lisa and Don and kids even drove up since it is spring break for them this week. Skyler and Rachel were there and Whitni was also with them since Ryan couldn't come. It was harder on me to see my siblings than I had thought it would be. It's funny how I will think I am doing fine and then someone comes up and expresses condolences and it touches me off. When I hugged Kathy goodbye before leaving for home, she put her arms around me and said, "Sue, I'm so sorry to leave you. I had fully intended to be around to help you through this and I am just so sorry that I will be so far away when you need me. Remember that you can call me anytime." I know that is true but I would feel badly if I thought it was weighing too heavily on her since I want them to just be able to pull away and give their full hearts to the work.

Abby and her husband blessed their little girl at the house before we had dinner and it was very touching. She is a beautiful baby with lots of black hair and her name is Olivia Jayne. I know that Kathy and Dick will miss all the grandkids but it is thrilling to think that they are in the MTC right now and next week will be winging their way to Anchorage. The Church shipped their car for them so that they can have it available to use. They are office missionaries and will serve at the heart of the mission. They were excited and ready to go.

Last week was such favorable weather that I worked for several hours in the yard. It was a terrific mess in the back with all the dead leaves under the snow and it was good therapy to get it cleaned up and looking better. My favorite pine tree had one limb rip off from the weight of the snow earlier in the season and I sawed off that branch and loaded it into the pickup and dumped

it in the pasture where I am piling the other dead branches and stuff. I have spread some weed killer along the driveway and front of the property and pruned an apple tree. Hopefully the weather will be warm tomorrow and I can get some more done. It sure feels good to get outside.

I've appreciated everyone's emails and phone calls. Just when I start to feel lonely someone touches base with me and I feel rejuvenated. You are all very dear to me and are my lifeline right now as I adjust to the new reality in my life. I still have to shake myself and realize that the events of the last six weeks really happened and my life is changed forever. That's too big a step right now to take. I need to say, "Just make the most of today and take the time you need to adjust and heal." I do pretty good during the day but the nights get lonely. That's to be expected. I love you.

March 25, 2009

Last week our weather was absolutely wonderful. For several days I worked in the yard, raking the accumulation of the winter and pruning the apple trees. It felt so good to be outside in the sunshine and to have the piles of snow finally disappear from the shady areas around and under the trees. But all that changed on Sunday when we had a huge rainstorm come through the area. Everything turned blustery and cold. During Relief Society it rained so hard that it sounded like a freight train was coming through. For a few minutes we couldn't figure out what was going on and then we realized it was just the rain on the roof. I'm grateful for the moisture and hopefully it will green things. Joanne Tominaga mentioned that Richard had gotten ambitious and mowed their lawn the day before and you could hear the groans from the sisters. I guess we all know that once we start mowing, it will be there to be done until the end of October and so we are dragging our feet. This cold weather is giving us all a reprieve.

SaraKay came home Saturday night and we went to the high school's performance of Cats. She had promised several of the kids in the cast that she would be sure to attend and I know it was fun for her. I had already been once but I went again and it was so much better on Saturday than on Monday! I sat there thinking about a year ago when SaraKay was starring in "Honk" and at how different life is right now for me than it was a year ago. I also couldn't help thinking that it doesn't take very long to get "out of the loop" when your last child graduates from high school. There were so many of the cast members that I didn't recognize and last year I could name every person in the cast and knew most of their parents. I have to remind myself that although I look back fondly on those high school experiences, there were enough difficult ones that it is good to move on. SaraKay got a little melancholy but she's moving on, too.

Gary dropped by to help me move the trampoline (he calls each week to see if I need help and this time I did) and we visited about his family. I thought you would enjoy an update. Ashley is engaged and they have set the date as May 1st in the Logan Temple. They will have a reception here that evening. Most of you probably met her beau at the funeral. He certainly seems like a fine young man! They are so excited and plan to move to Albuquerque following the wedding where he has employment. Ryan and McKenzie have been living in the Dallas, TX area and Ryan is job hunting. He has his doctorate and has been offered a job at a college in TX but they want to look around a little before deciding what to do. Lisa and Jason are almost through in Albuquerque and he has taken a job with a military installation in the Monterrey Bay area. They are so excited! He is just finishing up his doctorate after a long five years living in the southwest. It's sure wonderful to see Gary and Linda's kids doing so well. It's an exciting time for them. Congratulations to all the graduates. (I've appreciated Gary looking out for me and dropping by to help.)

The last couple of days I have spent several hours at the computer retyping 1989 family letters. When I scanned them in, the print was so light and the paper so faded that the scanner couldn't translate them and they were a huge mess. I have found that I am better off with these early letters retyping them and getting them in a good, crisp, format. It has been like a walk down memory lane to read these letters. One of the things that is going on in the last of 1989 was when Grandma Barbara was fighting the cancer tumor in her lungs and undergoing experimental procedures to see if it could be arrested. It has been so gripping to read her and Grandpa's comments as she goes through that difficult time. It has been interesting to me to see how similar her and Dad's (Steve's) experiences were towards the end of her life when she was on oxygen and fighting for breath. With all my involvements and because she was never one to

complain, I didn't appreciate how much she was suffering at the end.

I'm grateful to be preserving this for posterity. I am excited to get our family letters in order and published. I would also like to work with Dad's siblings and publish Grandpa and Grandma's personal histories and family letters. Let's talk about doing that and getting them published in hard back copy for all their posterity.

The other morning, I awoke and had the thought come that I can't publish my personal history without one from Daddy, too. I am going to have to draw from the experiences of his parents and siblings (especially Gary,) to come up with a time line and anecdotes about his early years. I am not ready yet for that, but would all of you siblings start jotting down things that you remember about Steve when he was growing up? In a few months I will be ready to start on his biography and I'm going to need your memories.

I received a sweet update from my sister, Kathy, on their first week in the MTC. This week is an intense one with learning all they need to know about how the mission office machines work and how the system functions. She sounded upbeat and excited! She also said, "We need more couples!"

I have appreciated everyone's calls and concern for me. I am doing well. I have so many projects right now that I can't see how I'm ever going to get them all done, but someone told me that I need to keep busy and find purpose in my life, and so I guess these family history projects and the yard are both blessings to me. I'm finally figuring out how to bank online and I'm gradually figuring out our finances and what bills to pay each month. I've gone to the temple each week since Daddy died and I know that it is helping me find peace. People in the community continue to look after me and offer to help. This past week I've had someone leave flowers, someone offer to mow the lawn, someone just drop in and offer to rototill and others who stop me wherever I am and express sympathy. I'm still getting cards and letters and emails to cheer me and let me know that others are thinking of me and praying for me. I so appreciate all of these gestures of kindness. I tell people that I'm doing okay. And I am. I'm not doing great but I'm doing fine for the situation that I am in and I know it is because of your prayers and the Comforter sustaining me. When Gary asked if I would like to attend Ashley's wedding, I gave a resounding, "Yes!" I would love to continue being involved in any way I can because I do get lonely and interaction with any of the family helps fill that void. I am looking forward to having several of the kids and their families here for General Conference weekend and to going to Boise for Chantelle's baptism on April 11th. SaraKay has spring break starting April 13th and we have plans to do some shopping and relax until she starts back the following week. I plan to attend Women's Week at BYU-I with SaraKay and I'm hoping to fly to Michigan in the next couple of months. See, I really do have some exciting things coming up and that keeps me going! How I love each of you! Keep me in your prayers.

March 29, 2009

Last weekend SaraKay was home Saturday night but we got to spend so little time together that we decided we would meet in Idaho Falls midweek to shop for some Levi's and shoes she needed. By Monday she called and said that she realized she had a concert Wednesday night so it wouldn't work for her to meet in Idaho Falls. She suggested that I come to Rexburg and we could shop there for a couple hours and then she would be able to do both. I agreed. I met her at three and we made a mad dash to the few clothing stores in town. By 6:30 she had found some jeans and I left her and headed home. By that time a winter storm that had been mild on my trip to Rexburg had hit with fury and I traveled home on slushy roads and winter conditions. It was a nightmare when big trucks would go lumbering past and splash all that slush onto my car and create a no visibility situation for a few seconds. I was grateful to arrive home safe and sound.

That evening I had the annual ditch meeting and when I got there it was disheartening to see all of us women and no men there except Kevin Godfrey. On our ditch we have Edna Disney, Maria Cruz, Brenda Godfrey, Marilyn Fresh, and me who are all single women and not much help with stuff like ditch issues. Fortunately, although mostly women showed for the meeting, we did get reassurances from Reed Hanni, Bruce Ellis, and Brent Young that they would see that the ditching got done and things were in order for the water which is due to arrive the middle of April.

This past week I got a lot done on my family history projects. In last week's letter I requested from Dad's siblings any family letters (Barbara and Allan's) that had been sent between '77-90. Gary called and said that he had

saved a bunch and he brought his over and I spent a few hours and was able to combine what he had and what I had and come up with a pretty fair representation. It is an especially poignant experience to read through the letters since those years included the ones when Grandpa ran for Governor and the years that Grandma was fighting cancer. Both Gary and I feel that it would be wonderful to get these letters published and available to the extended family. This is the same thing that I want to do with Grandma and Grandpa's Richards' missionary journals and their time in Pakistan. What a treasure for our families!

I had a relatively quiet and inside week. Thursday Nate called and asked about coming on Friday to visit enroute to a baptism in Salt Lake of Chelsea's daughter. I offered to fix them lunch. I was so excited to have a chance to visit with them and appreciated them taking time to stop here in Blackfoot.

Friday morning Gary called and said that he wanted to bring over his letters and so I mentioned that Nate and Maureen would be here for lunch and Gary said he would come earlier since he and Linda work at the temple on Friday.

I got up early and got lunch cooking when the doorbell rang. It was Pat Ricks. She is a friend from Riverside whose husband died just a few days after Daddy. We had both been on the stake Trek committee several years ago and grew to be good friends through that shared experience. When I heard that Max had passed away suddenly of a heart attack, I kept thinking that I should go see her. I just didn't though, mainly because she works full time and I hesitated going at night. I'm still a little skittish about anyone coming to see me at night. Anyway, I answered my door and here she is with a gift in hand and a big smile. We embraced and she came in and sat and we shared experiences.

About an hour later the doorbell rang and it was Gary. Pat was already on her feet ready to leave, so I ushered her out and Gary in. We spent a while going over his records and mine. I was overjoyed to have Gary so happy to work with me on this project. I could see that he has had an interest for a long time in family history and I think with his help we can accomplish some of these projects that Daddy and I have talked about but never got done.

Within ten minutes the doorbell rang again and Nate and Maureen arrived. We had a wonderful time over lunch and I felt so buoyed up and strengthened by their concern and love. We have so much in common with our big families.

As they went to leave, I offered them some potatoes. Since losing Dad, my food storage has all at once become a burden (especially the fresh stuff). I gave them a bag and Maureen commented that just recently she had become acquainted with a woman who is homeless but who is presently living in a hotel. Maureen and Nate took her some deer meat which she totally appreciated since she is part American Indian, and at the time Maureen thought that she wished she had some potatoes to go with the meat. Well, she said, now they have potatoes to take to her as well. Just a small tender mercy for me, Maureen, and her new friend.

A few hours later the doorbell rang again and it was Lori Cammack, a long-time friend of both Daddy and I. Lori lived in our ward for several years and served as the stake Young Women's president while Dad was in the stake presidency. Lori is an amazing lady and she had brought a sweet CD for me with music about love, separation, and relationships. We had a wonderful time catching up on the news of her family since she and Rulon moved to Blackfoot about three years ago and we've lost contact. After Lori left, I opened the card that she had given me and enclosed was a sweet letter talking about her experiences working with Daddy. It was very touching and thoughtful and I really appreciated it.

By the end of the day, I felt so rejuvenated. Although I usually try to go to the temple on Friday, with so many visitors that day I went instead on Saturday. As I drove home from the temple, I couldn't help thinking of all my many blessings. I have such a good life right now with time to do family history work, loving family and friends who buoy me up, a warm home and food to eat, and a testimony of the plan of salvation. I would love to add Daddy to this list of blessings but for now I can accept that he is gone but not far away. Hopefully he can see that I'm managing and that he can move ahead with the work he has been called to do.

SaraKay mentioned to me when we were together that she had been worrying about forgetting the sound of Dad's voice. She had a dream one night and just before she awoke, she thought she heard him say her name. It was an instantaneous thing but brought her comfort that she wouldn't forget him and he certainly was not forgetting her.

I had a dream about Daddy, too. I was invited to attend the baby blessing for Mori and Elizabeth Albarez's new baby. Elizabeth had been a sister missionary here for several months while Daddy and I were missionaries and so I would go on splits with her and we got very close. After her mission she returned to the area and eventually married Mori, the son of Mike and Nikki Larsen who they took in after his mother died in a car accident. Mori had worked for Daddy at scout camp for two summers and they had a wonderful friendship over the years.

Last night, as I was thinking about attending Moreland Third Ward's meeting for the blessing, it dawned on me that I should have picked up a gift for their new baby. I felt badly that I hadn't thought of it sooner. Then I thought, "Oh, I'll give them some money and they can buy what they need." I knew that Mori had recently been laid off at his job and I knew that they are struggling. Well, I wondered what amount to give since I am still a little paranoid about my budget and how my finances are all going to shake out each month. This was on my mind when I went to sleep. In my dream I was with Daddy and I couldn't find my check book and he opened his wallet and gave me some money to give them for the baby. That was the end of my dream. When I woke up, I felt that I should move ahead and that Daddy would approve of it.

I have been so grateful that I have the financial resources that I need but I do feel a little guilty that I'm here spending it and Daddy didn't get to reap the fruits of all his labors and planning. I guess that sounds silly but I feel such a need to spend what I do have with care so he knows that I deeply appreciate his sacrifices.

Today when I got to church, I noticed that Nolan Furniss had Jack Brooks with him who we have been working with for several years. His wife and two children bought Clete Marlow's home and we have visited as ward missionaries, visited as friends, visited as neighbors, and had them here in our home several times. Well, a few weeks ago his wife left him for work in California, his son left for the military, and the step-daughter left to join her mother in California. Jack has a drinking problem and it has been an issue most of their lives and I guess everyone just left.

Two weeks ago, Jack had been drinking and passed out in the middle of the road when he went to get his mail and fortunately someone came along from the ward, notified the missionaries and soon the Twiggs and Nolan were there helping with the situation. Jack has been in rehab the last two weeks but was at church today with Nolan. He got up and bore his testimony and basically said that he wasn't a Mormon and didn't have a testimony of it but that he did know that since his family had moved into the ward nearly three years ago that the Mormon people had shown such love and concern, had brought food to the house, had helped with all kinds of projects and all of it without ever asking for anything in return. He said that he was a spiritual person who believed in God and that he judged the strength of the Mormon faith on the way we loved our neighbors and he felt that any Church that showed such kindness must have a lot going for it. It was a sweet testimony and heart-warming. It is amazing to me how many of our original contacts when we were missionaries are still being worked with and touched by continuing efforts of the ward.

Well, I have stake choir practice in a few minutes so I'll close. We have had a real blizzard outside for the last few hours and high winds for the last two days. Last night it rained so hard that I kept getting up to make sure it wasn't leaking anywhere. (It wasn't.) Right now, the wind has quit and there is a beautiful calm snowfall going on and the ground is covered. All in a 24-hour period. Hopefully I won't have to use the snowblower to clear the driveway! Not really, it will probably all be gone by tomorrow. That's Idaho for you. There is a big fat red-breasted robin who has been busy making a nest in one of our pine trees. She looks like she's about due to lay a nest full of eggs. This afternoon she has been wandering around on the snowy ground and I suspect that she is thinking, "What in tarnation! I thought spring had sprung!"

April 17, 2009

SaraKay arrived home from Rexburg on Thursday after completing her first semester at BYU-I and it felt good to have her here with me for a few days. We did some shopping on Friday and then left Saturday morning for Boise to attend Chantelle's baptism. Dave and Andrea held a dinner prior to the baptism and then we all got ready and went to the stake center. It was so sweet to share in this experience and later to visit with Dave and Andrea about it. Several from Andrea's family were there as well as SaraKay, Tim, Shauntel and Randy and their family and me.

David and Andrea had invited some non-member friends to come to the dinner and baptism and it was interesting to see their response and how considerate they were in honoring Chantelle during this sacred occasion. They had even gone to a Deseret Book store to get just the right gift for the occasion although they didn't completely understand what would go on.

The stake baptism was for children from several wards and all of those children had family and friends present. It was a joyous occasion with lots of small children and so it wasn't quite as reverent as a normal sacrament meeting. When the groups filed out to the font, the children sat on the carpet in front of the font and had a front row seat for the individual baptisms. It was fun to see the excitement on their faces. As our group moved into the room for Chantelle's confirmation, there was standing room only. When Chantelle came in wearing her nearly floor length white dress, her two little brothers were so fascinated with "Princess Chantelle" that they couldn't be restrained from approaching her and touching the fluffy layers of her skirt. I kept thinking of the song, "In our Lovely Deseret, where the saints of God have met, there's a multitude of children all around." It was a bit of heaven.

During the confirmation and blessing, David mentioned Grandpa Stephen and it was very touching. Later, David and Andrea mentioned that in preparation for her special day, Chantelle had read the Book of Mormon and for several weeks had been praying that Grandpa Stephen and Grandma Louise (her great-grandmother on Andrea's side) would be present for her baptism. Following her confirmation, while the other child from their ward was confirmed, Chantelle sat in David's arms with tears streaming down her face. She had prepared herself for a spiritual experience and certainly was rewarded for her faith. She later told Andrea that when she was confirmed she had the words come into her mind, "I am with you. I am with you." I have no doubt that her grandpa wanted her to know that he was a part of this special occasion.

Saturday night SaraKay and I stayed at Tim's. We had never seen his new home but we were certainly impressed! He has made some wonderful improvements to it including laying tile in the kitchen/dining area, and redoing the fireplace. It was so modern and stylish and a great floor plan. Although Tim had originally planned to give us his bed and sleep downstairs on the couch, his roommates were having a movie date in the family room so he moved a mattress into his master bedroom and slept on the floor while SaraKay and I took the bed. It was so fun just to talk and laugh until the wee hours of the morning. We even slept in since Tim's meetings are at 1:00 and then we attended his meetings with him. That was also enjoyable since so many of the ward leaders came up to say hello and compliment us on Tim.

Before we got to the meetings, we told Tim that we would look the ward over and choose someone we thought that he should marry. He was such a good sport about it and so SaraKay and I sat during his choir practice and took note of all the girls we saw. We picked one out in particular and when choir was over, we told Tim who our choice was and he admitted that he had tried to get something going with this particular girl but she just wasn't interested. Well, during Relief Society this girl came up to sit by us and visit and had such high praise for Tim and all he has accomplished with his job, his schooling, and goals. It was fun to relate this conversation to Tim later and boost his self-esteem despite the fact that things hadn't worked out between them. Anyway, we thoroughly enjoyed the one-on-one with Tim and the opportunity to invade his "world" for a few hours.

Following meetings, we returned to Dave and Andrea's and spent a fun evening with them. Most of the weekend company was gone and we were able to visit (eat leftovers from the dinner the previous day), and relax. Later David and I drove Tim back to his car that he had left at the church and I had a chance talk over a few items of business with David before returning home. I so appreciate all of you kids and your advice to me on some of the issues I am working through in regards to my widowhood.

Monday morning SaraKay and I left about nine for home. We stopped enroute in Burley where we visited, had a delicious fajita lunch with Mike and Marci and girls, and continued on home. It was such a fun Easter weekend for us! I was grateful for the chance to be with family away from here since Easter is always an emotional time and more so this year with Dad's passing so recently. Thanks to all who made it so special.

My one regret this past week is that the weather has been so bad that I haven't been able to use SaraKay to help me with the yard. Yesterday Don Scott dropped in and offered to bring his little tractor down and rototill the garden area for me. I

am going to take him up on his offer as I haven't gotten the tiller out of the shed yet and the weeds in the garden are already making a statement. The sprinklers are still under warranty and Matt Reid is coming next week to service them and help orient me on turning them on. It's been too cold for potting flowers.

This Saturday Daddy will be honored and inducted into the Grand Teton Council's Hall of Fame at the annual council recognition night. I bought a new outfit so I can look better than I'll feel and hopefully I can get through the presentation without my emotions getting the best of me. In Tim's meeting on Sunday, I had a meltdown during the closing song and soon Tim was red-eyed too so I try to keep the tears for when I'm home and not in public. Sometimes it can't be helped and I know people understand, but it's still hard.

SaraKay has been getting things ready for returning to Rexburg. She has hauled all kinds of things out of the basement and we are going to take them tomorrow and get her moved in although she will not be officially going until Sunday since she wanted to attend the recognition on Saturday night. She has been a little bored but is at orchestra practice tonight and then has an Anne of Green Gables marathon movie night at a friend's house afterwards. She is raring to go and anxious to get back to school. She ended up with a 3.85 GPA despite the upset midterm of Daddy' s passing. Hopefully she will be able to keep her scholarship for another year. It's nice to have her around but I don't blame her for being anxious to return to school. I'm so grateful that the resources are available and that she is having a great experience. She and Tim did some conferring on her course of action regarding a few romances that she is trying to foster and he gave her some good advice. (Why is it that a brother's advice is always better than a mother's?) Anyway, I'm grateful that "Prince Charming" hasn't come along yet and would be happy if he didn't arrive for a few more years, but we'll deal with that when and if it happens.

April 21, 2009

This past week was full of bittersweet occasions. On Wednesday the Snake River Community Orchestra held their year-end concert and Logan Anderson who played first trumpet and sat by Daddy was the guest performer with a trumpet concerto. The members of the orchestra dedicated the number to Dad. Bill Hammond, a long-time friend, read a sweet tribute just prior to the concerto and then Linnea presented me with flowers. Fortunately, I didn't have to be on stage. They recognized that it would be difficult and so arranged for me to sit in the first row and just bring the flowers to me instead of me going on stage. Bill's tribute was so sweet that tears were flowing and I was grateful to be in a darkened auditorium.

Then on Saturday night Daddy was awarded the Grand Teton's highest award, the Hall of Fame Award, at the annual council-wide recognition night. Steve, Stephani, Shauntel, Tim, Mike, Marci, and SaraKay represented the immediate family and Uncle Gary also came. I had been dreading the occasion since I knew it was going to be an emotional night and it was, but fortunately Mike (my onstage escort) and I kept it together and it turned out to be a very sweet experience. When we were backstage waiting for our turn to be honored, both Mike and I were struggling and it didn't help any that one of Dad's closest work associates, Joaquin Blanco, commented that he sure felt that Steve (Daddy) would be present for the event. I had had similar thoughts but having them voiced right before going out into the spotlight wasn't the best timing.

Following the presentation, the kids and I greeted guests in the commons; lots of sweet people with high praise for Dad. By about 9:00 we headed for home and spent the next hour visiting about the event and the people we met. Steve tried to video tape the award presentation but the lighting was poor and he felt that he didn't get a quality product. There were other pictures taken so hopefully we got some good ones. I think Marci had a camera going, too.

On Saturday about 3:00 I got a call from John. The previous day Tessa had developed a rash on her arms and by the next morning her hand was swollen and infection was coming out under her fingernails. They immediately took her to the doctor and she was admitted to the hospital. An IV was inserted in which antibiotics were introduced into her bloodstream and John and Laurel were told that until she improved dramatically, she would need to remain hospitalized. Since then either John or Laurel have been with her around the clock.

On Saturday night the IV accidently came out and another had to be put in. If any of you are familiar with the procedure, it can be difficult to find a vein

big enough in which to insert the needle. This was especially true of Tessa's arm since she is still such a little mite and doesn't have much meat on her bones. During the episode in which they were trying to get the IV in Laurel fainted and she was rushed to the emergency room. Fortunately, she didn't hit her head or have any other injuries as a result of her fall but it is indicative of the stress she was under watching Tessa struggling. At one point Tessa was so listless and feverish that she just laid in the bed, almost lifeless. When she looked up at John and Laurel, she said in a most plaintive voice, "I need help." I'm sure it about broke their hearts to see this little one who has already gone through so much, have to go through even more. She has improved and John said that they are hoping to take her home today. He has been sleeping nights at the hospital and then Laurel trades him off during the day. Our prayers continue with them.

SaraKay and I spent another day shopping on Wednesday trying to finish up things before she started the new semester today. We spent some time in the mall and got a cute Sunday outfit for her. The one like it on display had a big, wide, braided dark brown belt but she didn't want to pay the $17 dollars they were asking for it and so she wanted to try finding one at DI. I didn't want to go back across town but we did and were so pleased to find one almost exactly like the one we saw in Penny's. It's so fun to buy a cute belt for $1 instead of $17! She got some shoes and other needed items and feels like she is ready for a Rexburg spring and summer semester.

Tim arrived home about 6:30 Friday evening ready to play some tennis with a new ball dispenser he bought but much to his dismay, the tennis courts at our stake center didn't have the nets up. I started calling anyone I could think of in the stake who knew anything about the athletic facilities and couldn't find anyone who knew where they were. Tim came home and settled into trying to help install my new computer and retrieve data from the old one. Five hours later he was still retrieving and installing. The next morning, I called the high counselor over sports and he said that he would meet us at the shelter and unlock it so we could see if the nets were in the storage area. They were and we helped Tim get them put up and situated before the two of us left for home and Tim played tennis for the next 2 hours. He got quite a workout with the balls coming at him about one a second. I was grateful that he finally got to play.

When he arrived home, he continued helping orient me on Microsoft Word and transferring all my family history stuff into folders that I could easily reach. I know I stretched his patience nearly to the breaking point. He kept trying to show me how logical navigating on a computer is, but logic isn't my strong suit and much of the computer workings just haven't clicked with me yet. It's a credit to him that he never got upset or threw his hands up in resignation during the whole session. He's going to be a great dad with all that patience. I have been using the computer all I could this week so I can get Paul and Jenny's help this weekend on any problems that I encounter this week. It's wonderful to have such smart, computer literate children.

In closing let me tell you about a "widow" moment I had yesterday. I have been determined to keep the yard and house looking spiffy and I found some weed/lawn spray that I decided to use to kill the dandelions in our yard. Daddy recently purchased a sprayer that has straps so that the person spraying wears the tank for the liquid like a backpack with a side pump that you pump to keep the pressure built up so the sprayer works. So, ideally, a person walks along, pumping with the right arm and spraying with the wand with the left arm. Well, Daddy had praised this new gadget so much last summer that I had no qualms about thinking that I was going to use it, too. So, after carefully reading the instructions on the weed killer bottle, I put in the amount and filled the tank with the three gallons of water. It didn't take much time for me to realize that three gallons weighed more than I ever dreamed but undaunted I lifted the tank onto the top step of the front sidewalk and then with a few gyrations I loaded the backpack onto my back by slipping into the shoulder straps. Just as I had imagined, the tank was easier to carry on my back than on my side so I slowly made my way to the far side of the lawn, pumping with all my might. I was able to manage okay but I knew I looked ridiculous so I tried to keep a low profile as cars went driving by. At one point the thought of me tipping backward onto the three-gallon tank and being unable to right myself came into my mind. What a sight I would be with my legs and arms flailing, like a large beetle that somehow got on its back and can't get turned back over. Fortunately, nothing so drastic happened. Eventually I emptied out the tank and completed the task. This morning I sprayed the driveway for weeds but I only loaded one gallon of liquid and it was much easier.

Now some of you may be saying, "Mom, just call someone for help." But, if I can do it myself that is my first choice and when the time comes that I can't, I have lots of offers and I will call someone for assistance. I need to keep strong physically and all this computer work certainly is a lot of sitting so it's nice to have work to keep me moving.

Sunday I taught in Relief Society and the lesson was on dealing with persecution. One of the quotes by the Prophet Joseph dealt with going through not only persecution but trials, adversity, temptations, etc. and the prophet gave a key to enduring well. He said that we should never betray the Lord, the leaders of the Church, or the gospel. Part of it mentioned that as we go through "kicking and floundering" that we need to stay true to the gospel. I loved that phrase because it helps me to know that part of our earthly experience is to meet up with challenges and that even if we are "kicking and floundering" we can stay true and make it. There have been some moments in the last few months when I felt like that phrase described me.

I got Grandma Ilene's Pakistan journal copied this morning and I am hiring a woman in Mike's ward to transcribe it. I had the slides done professionally but some of them weren't as high quality as I had hoped for but they are 25 years old so I shouldn't expect Grandpa Arch's camera to take the same quality that ours do today.

April 27, 2009

Several of you have asked how I am enjoying my new computer and I will say it is wonderful! Daddy tried so hard to get me to upgrade but the last upgrade we did was so difficult for me to adjust to that I pleaded with him to just leave me alone and let me keep what I knew and liked. Well, I guess in the meantime the rest of the world moved on and my Corel WordPerfect XP became obsolete. I feared that getting this new computer and Vista would set me back and I would have to learn everything all over again, but the nice thing is that Corel and Word are very similar and it hasn't been as hard as I thought it would be. I'm so grateful for Tim helping me while he was here.

Throughout the week I made notes so that when Paul and Jenny arrived, they could answer all my questions. Most importantly, they got the scanner working and Jenny scanned a lot of Grandma Ilene's Pakistan Journal entries and I have enough scanned to keep me busy for the next couple of weeks and probably longer. Hopefully, I'll remember how she did it.

Paul and Jenny arrived late Friday night after a whirlwind day attending Jenny's brother's wedding in Salt Lake, the wedding dinner at the Joseph Smith Memorial Building, taking part in family pictures, and helping at the reception that night. By the time it was over it had been a very full day and they then had the trip here on top of that. They arrived about 1:00 a.m. and got all the kids down soon thereafter. Saturday, they helped me in a multitude of ways, especially on the computer and Paul helped repair my bike and get started sorting things in the garage. He is such a great organizer! Between time out for playing with Beth, Ben, Sophie, and Daniel and having a back yard picnic, I managed to have time to observe Jenny working with my scanner and help Paul in the garage. The kids were so good to play and all in all we had a great day!

We had a babysitter lined up that evening so that Paul, Jenny, and I could attend the Saturday evening session of conference but part way through the day Jenny decided she would stay with the children and let Paul and I go to the session since Daniel had been a little congested and she wasn't sure a sitter could manage things. It was sweet to attend the meeting with Paul at my side. I don't know exactly why but those kinds of situations are difficult for me right now...going to events where there are big crowds. I easily attend my ward events and get along fine but other events are still hard. I feel so conspicuous. I know people don't know what to say to me and I feel badly that they are feeling awkward around me, but I know it will take time for it to work through.

On Sunday morning Paul and Jenny got all the kids ready and left here about nine to attend meetings in Midway with her family who were gathering at the cabin for a two-day family reunion. What fun! I so appreciated Paul and Jenny coming all that way for one day! I offered to meet them in Utah but I think they wanted to help me with some of my projects and knew they couldn't unless they were here. Thank you to them and to all of you who are calling, emailing, and making my transition here a little easier.

Saturday morning, I helped at a funeral service for one of our investigators. He was the fellow who I mentioned the ward missionaries were working with who was in rehab for alcoholism. He was killed in an automobile accident a week ago and

the ward has notified family in California, provided the funeral program and a luncheon following, and yesterday after conference the missionaries, bishopric, elder's quorum presidency and neighbors helped get them loaded into a moving van and on their way to California. (The wife left several months ago and has been working in California. She had to be back to work on Tuesday morning and was just frantic with what to do to clean out the house and get back to CA by tomorrow.) Talk about fellowshipping! The son who arrived from South Carolina was totally swept off his feet by the goodness of neighbors and ward members. Hopefully the day will come when our efforts will bear fruits in the form of baptisms but for now it is just the right thing to do.

I mowed the lawn for the first time on Thursday. I was so proud of myself! I even backed the mower out of the little shed without incident. As soon as the motor started up the horses came running for the usual grass clippings and I mowed for a while and then pulled up next to the fence to dump the two grass baskets. To my surprise and the horses' dismay, there was not a single blade of grass in the catcher!

Two years ago, shortly after we bought the catcher Daddy cut a corner too close and knocked off the big pipe that goes from the blade to the baskets, but he cleverly jerry-rigged it and it functioned pretty well last summer. When SaraKay mowed last week, we couldn't get it to work and our grass was so thick that she raked it. Well, to make a long explanation short, I removed the pipe and decided to just mow and forget the grass catcher. My neighbor, Brent Young, saw what was going on and came across the street to offer his services. I told him that I was going to do a little raking and he said that he would come over and run his mower over it and pick up the grass. He did and also moved the trampoline and did some other trimming for me. He also offered to take care of things for me when I go to Michigan. I'm going to work something out with him for the next couple of weeks.

That afternoon I got on the internet and checked prices for the grass catcher and it ran several hundred dollars. Later that afternoon I had the thought come that I could maybe just order the section of the pipe that had been ruined. I called Sears and they told me to bring the broken pipe in and they would look at it and see if a new pipe would solve the problem. They said it would be a fraction of the cost of the entire unit. I'm going to try that before I do anything else. When Ralph Jensen gave the mower a tune-up, he said that it was in excellent condition and would give me years of good mowing, so I hate to not use it. Brent Young also mentioned to me that perhaps the problem is exacerbated by the grass not being totally dry and he suggested mowing later in the day.

I mention this situation to let you know that I'm finding answers to the challenges I face. I'm feeling more confident each day that the Lord will help me come up with answers. When I first started taking care of the finances, I felt so overwhelmed. Stephani said to me, "Mom, you are smart and you can do this. Right now, it is new and intimidating, but when you get more familiar with it you will find that the ability to do this is empowering." That hasn't totally happened yet, but it's coming along.

I can hear some of you kids saying to yourselves, "Why is mother even worrying about the yard? She just needs to hire it done and quit fussing." I know that I could afford to do that but for now I am trying to utilize the resources I have. I have always enjoyed working outside and this year there is no garden so the yard will be my therapy. Trust me. If the yard is so challenging that it creates a need for therapy, I will give in and hire it done. I know one thing. I can't stay inside all summer and work on the computer without some excuse to go out and enjoy the sunshine! Matt Reid oriented me on the sprinkling system on Friday so I'm in business with that now, too.

Another decision I made this week was to put the Toyota pickup up for sale. Jim Wheeler has it on his lot and we have come up with a price for what it's worth. It needed some work and although Derek Hanni was interested in it, I hated to sell it to him when it had some problems that hadn't been diagnosed and fixed yet.

Let me close with a quick story. As the high priest group leader, Linds was in charge of lining up a program for the local rest home for last Sunday. He made assignments in the group but was having a difficult time come up with a musical number so Stephani volunteered her and Josh to play a piano/cello duet. (Sam is in Washington D.C. with "We the People" this week and couldn't help.) She said that the whole meeting was a pleasure to attend and the Spirit was so strong. It reminded her of when both her grandpas were in rest homes and Daddy and I would comment in the family letters on what a sweet experience it

was to attend with them. After the meeting was over, one of the residents approached her and Josh and asked Josh how old he was. He said that he was 15. The resident commented, "I thought that you were about the age of the Prophet Joseph and you look like you're just as fine a young man, too." (A sweet compliment for Josh and his mother.)

May 3, 2009

It's a beautiful Sabbath morning and I thought that I would get a jump on this letter since I'm leaving on Wednesday and won't be back until the 14th from Michigan. I feel like a world traveler with all the coming and going but it certainly spices up my life and gives me something to look forward to. I will be leaving about 8:30 Wednesday morning on the shuttle to the airport and arrive in Detroit at 8:30 John's time. I'm really looking forward to being with John and Paul and their families.

This past week I left for Logan on Wednesday and spent Wednesday and part of Thursday at Steve and Bonnie's. Although Bonnie hadn't mentioned it when she invited me, it turned out to be a perfect time to be in Wellsville as Chrissy had a school strings concert and I went and supported her in that. I was so impressed with the strings program and the number of participants in the sixth and seventh grade! The students played some really fun music and looked like they thoroughly enjoyed the opportunity to perform! Chrissy is doing so well with the cello and gave me a private recital just prior to going to the concert!

Thursday morning after the kids were off to school, Bonnie and I took a walk out through the countryside. It was a beautiful spring morning and we enjoyed the time together. Although Bonnie is doing much better health-wise, she still has some of the same problems they were addressing before her surgery so she will probably have to be on a regimen of physical therapy to strengthen her back and enable her to live without chronic pain. I'm grateful that she is doing better and able to care for her home and family. This is such a busy time in the life of their young family and there are many demands on both her and Steve.

I spent Thursday afternoon and Friday morning with Shauntel and her family. I was grateful to help out some with the duties that Shaunie has right now as the mother of four young children. I remember those days when you can't even sit down for a moment without someone needing you. Drake and Kinzie are both growing and getting more independent but it is still such a demanding time of life. Camille is good help around the house and even Archie is good to help with the babysitting and other chores. Randy arrived home later Thursday and helped with the kids the next morning while Shauntel and I went to the temple for Ashley's wedding. It was very sweet to be a part of that wonderful occasion!

It was especially sweet to see Daddy's siblings and get to visit. Mark, Rita, Jessica, Staff, Rick, Karen, Jim, and Teresa as well as Shauntel and I were in attendance as well as all of Gary and Linda's children and spouses. That is quite a feat to have all of their adult children endowed now! It was so fun to see everyone. The ceremony was beautiful and Ashley and Jeff both looked so happy! I kept thinking that the phrase "radiant bride" really was a fitting description of Ashley that day.

Shauntel and I left soon after the wedding to go home since Drake had been sick and needed his mother. I left for home and attended the reception at the Thomas Church. Jim and Karen had moved Teresa home from college that afternoon since she is graduating from USU so they didn't attend the reception in Idaho but the rest of the bunch were here for the festivities that night. Staff dropped by about five and we had a chance to talk about him and Kaye and how it's going for them. They certainly seem compatible and happy together. She didn't attend the wedding since she was at Women's Week at BYU with some friends, but Staff said that they continue to enjoy one another and spend a lot of time together.

The reception was so lovely and well attended. It gave me a little more visiting time with siblings and later Mark and Rita dropped by for a few minutes to pick up the binder I'd compiled with letters of Grandpa and Grandma Larsen's from '78-90'. He is going to take them and try scanning them in. On Saturday Mark called and said that he realized that he had heard of some software that you can install that is voice responsive. You just read out loud the information you want entered and it will show up on the computer screen. Wow! After looking and reading through several of the letters, he agreed with Gary and I that they probably wouldn't scan in very well since the paper is old and the writing is faint. That is the same problem I am having with the journals I am working with. I am so excited to get Mark helping on this project because I know

he is good at this kind of stuff and his help will be invaluable!

When I arrived home on Friday, I was surprised to see that my neighbor, Brent Young, had mowed and trimmed my lawn for me. He said that he knew I was going to Michigan sometime and he couldn't remember when so he got worried about the yard and just did it for me. It was a sweet gesture. He wouldn't take payment but I had a gift in mind for him and offered him a partial roll of barbed wire. He jumped at the chance for that since he uses it a lot and is getting his pasture ready for calves this year. I had called the co-op and got a price on it and it was more than adequate for repayment. I think we both felt good about the trade. I'm hoping that the weather clears enough by Tuesday so I can get the yard done up again before I take off, but it's been pretty rainy so we'll see how it goes. Once I am back from Michigan, I will be around for most of the summer.

John told me to bring the journal with me on a flash drive and he is going to go online and show me how to format it. I've been typing every spare minute I have and hopefully my lady in Burley will also have her part about finished up. It has been so interesting to retype Mother's entries and to feel her frustrations during their time in Pakistan. She certainly was out of her comfort zone during those 21 months. So many of her experiences mirror what I know of Becky's time in Korea, although I think Pakistan was and is such a terribly poor and backward culture. Some of the experiences just blow me away!

I'm going to quit and get this sent. I love each of you and pray that the Lord will strengthen each of you to find solutions to the problems you face. I look at the many situations developing in the economy right now and pray that each of you are doing what you can to secure yourselves against the financial hard times we are going through. It is humbling to know that at any time a job layoff could affect our family and turn our lives upside down. My prayers continue with each of you. Work hard, counsel together, honor the Sabbath, pay your tithes and offerings and be sure to have your prayers.

May 17, 2009

Wednesday morning, Janet Jenks dropped me off at the shuttle and I had an uneventful ride to the Salt Lake Airport, arriving in plenty of time to check-in, go through the hassle of security, and even grab a bite to eat before catching my flight to Detroit. It was so nice to have a non-stop flight and know that I didn't have the worry of changing planes. I took the book "John Adams" by David McCullough and loved the chance to get to read for a while. I enjoy reading about real people involved in difficult circumstances and their responses. This is the third of David McCullough's books I've read; he is truly a gifted author.

When I arrived in Detroit John and James were there waiting for me, James in his cub scout uniform, having just come from pack meeting. He looked so handsome! It was wonderful to be there with John and Laurel and their family and to be a part of their daily activities. Since the oldest three have school during the day, on Thursday Laurel and I took Tessa to a nearby park to feed the ducks, go for a stroll, and then go to the public library. It was obvious that Tessa was a frequent patron and Laurel warned me that the hardest thing about going to the library was prying Tessa away when it was time to go home. I could see why since it was full of exciting activities for all ages of children.

On Friday afternoon I tagged along as Laurel attended a Mother's Day program in Eliza's school class. Eliza had prepared ahead and included me in on all the festivities even though I was the only grandma there. It was a very touching presentation including skits, songs, original compositions, gift-giving, and refreshments. I was so grateful for the opportunity to see Eliza's school, meet her teacher and friends and get a feel for the community. That evening we attended a fundraiser sponsored by the school that featured all sorts of booths. It put me in mind of years gone by and the hectic schedule we'd keep with several kids in school and all their activities. I was so impressed with John and Laurel's situation!

On Friday I went with Laurel when she taught her class at the local community recreation center. I didn't think that I was up to being in her fitness class but I did spend the hour walking on the indoor track and then watched a senior citizen swim class. I also went with James to his swim lessons and enjoyed seeing all the classes offered. It was a busy place with something for the entire family and even a nursery available.

Although I wasn't there for a dance or piano recital, Emma performed for me the three dances that she will be competing with and all the children played their piano pieces for me. I sat in on their practice times in the mornings before

they left for school and I was so pleased with how well they are doing.

On Thursday and Friday evenings when the house had quieted down, John and I spent time on his computer going over the journal entries that I have been compiling and he formatted them for me and got me registered with "Lulu" so that I am ready to submit them when I finish things up. He has done it enough that he knew just what to do. I felt guilty adding to his load since he has been under a lot of pressure at work as well as the usual demands with family and church.

On Saturday morning we left for Midland and arrived there about noon. We got along pretty well on the two-hour trip except for towards the end when everyone was getting hungry and restless. I was sitting in the front next to John and he commented that on long trips they usually (1) entertain, (2) bribe, and (3) threaten. Just as he made this comment James called from the back asking if his dad had a gun. His timing was perfect for the moment and without hesitation, John responded that it was in the console between the seats. For a split second I became a believer in the "threaten" John had mentioned only to have him reach in the console and pull out some *gum.* We had a good laugh over my misunderstanding!

It was so nice for me to get to see Paul and Jenny's new home and their expansive yard. Although I had been to Canton before this was my first time visiting in Midland. Their home is located in a very nice neighborhood and close to an elementary and junior high school. Paul and Jenny have done an amazing amount of work on the house, remodeling the kitchen, laying a hardwood floor, putting in new windows and of course, completely siding it last year. I was so impressed with what a lovely home it is and although it has kept them busy with all the updates, it is a great house with lots of room for their growing family. One of my favorite things about it was the large wooden deck that extends almost the entire length of the house in the back.

After lunch, we spent some time at the "Dow Gardens" in Midland. The gardens are lovely and were obviously a popular place for the community. The only problem we had was that it was prom and between photographers taking pictures of high school couples and elaborate bridal parties, we had to be careful that our group of seven rambunctious children didn't get in the middle of some couple's dream portrait. I could understand why it is a favorite spot for wedding pictures; there were beautiful streams, trees, flowers, and other picturesque sights. When we first arrived, there was a stretch limo parked out front and the wedding parties were coming and going the whole time we were there.

That evening Jenny, Laurel, and the older girls attended a concert at the church and Paul, John, and I kept track of the younger kids. Before the night was over John became quite sick and so Laurel ended up driving the two hours back to Canton while he rested. I worried that his headache was partially my fault from all the late nights we had worked on the computer and visited. Laurel and I would usually catch a nap the following day but John would go to bed late and arise early for work so he was worn out.

On Mother's Day I attended Paul and Jenny's ward and enjoyed the chance to rub shoulders with many of their close friends. It was obvious that they have found their way into the hearts of their ward. Following sacrament meeting I took Sophie's hand and escorted her to the nursery. It was so heart-warming to see people's response to her and to call her by name as we made our way to her class. When we first arrived at our meetings that morning, I had Sophie's hand and somehow we got separated from Paul and Jenny and the rest of the family. We entered the chapel and sat on the front row of chairs in the breezeway. Pretty soon a very distinguished gentleman approached, greeted us, commented on Sophie’s beautiful Sunday dress and appearance, greeted me and then proceeded to his seat in the congregation. Later I learned that he had recently been released as the stake president, had served as the ward nursery leader, and that he and Sophie had become fast friends. I was touched by his goodness and efforts to build and strengthen Sophie.

I was so impressed with the ward in general. It had a lot of vitality and goodness. The choir performed a very difficult number and about half the ward choir was comprised of youth and primary children. There were about six Aaronic priesthood YM singing and I thought about how strong they must be to participate in what usually is the domain of the adults of the ward. The scoutmaster gave one of the talks on Motherhood and spoke of several women who had positively influenced his life including an early school teacher who refused to let him "just get by." I felt like Paul and Jenny have "fallen among angels" in

their new home in Midland. I regretted not being able to attend John and Laurel's ward but vowed to next year when I visit again. It really helps me get a feel for things when I can attend church with my kids and their families.

Sunday afternoon we made the long trip back to Canton to share a wonderful Mother's Day meal at John and Laurel's. I worried about all the hours in the car with the four little ones but they took the trip in their stride. Laurel was such a gracious hostess to welcome us after her late-night trip the night before, John's early departure for bishopric meetings Sunday morning, and the fact that no one had really made much of a fuss over her on this special Mother's Day. She and Jenny both had put aside their own comforts to entertain me and I really appreciated their efforts to make it so memorable for me.

About six we loaded up and headed for home. Part of the ride home went smoothly, but about an hour outside of Midland little Sophie had a meltdown. I think she had been so excited to play that she hadn't eaten much at dinner and it was hitting her that she was very hungry. Anyway, she started crying and yelling and we all did what we could to calm her and get her settled and home. Most of our efforts failed but part way through the upset, Paul reached back with his right hand and stroked her legs and feet while he continued to drive. He probably didn't think much of it but I was sitting in the back with Beth and Ben and quietly observed his strong arm and caring hands gently try to bring her comfort. It was one of those moments when as a parent you realize that your child has somehow matured and become something far finer than you ever imagined and I was touched and grateful for Paul's quiet gentleness in an otherwise crazy situation.

On Monday I walked Beth and two neighborhood children to school and at noon we had a picnic and let the kids play on the playground equipment. While Jenny kept an eye on Ben and Sophie, I sat on a bench and held Daniel. You would have thought I was holding some rare breed of animal the way the children gathered around me and asked questions about Daniel. They wanted to hold him, to see his new teeth, to make him laugh, and hold his little hands. He was definitely the "star of the show" until the noon recess bell rang. For home evening we returned to the playground which was pretty much deserted and Paul and the kids played until nearly time for bed. Home evening concluded with a lesson and stories and prayer.

On Tuesday Paul took the day off and we all worked in the yard. Jenny has been planting fruit trees but other trees had to be removed before her fruit trees could be planted and so Paul spent the day chopping down trees and then removing stumps. What an enormous task! He used an awl and would have to chop the roots, separating them from the trunk and then chop the trunk into bits and remove it piece by piece. When they informed me that Paul would be "felling" trees, I told them to not let me know when it was going to happen because I "hailed" from a country far away where the only way a tree grows is when someone plants it, waters it, and then prays over it. The very thought of cutting down a tree (other than one that is totally dead) is a painful one to me and certainly not the way we do things in Idaho. Anyway, they moved ahead and not only removed trees but bushes, replanted lawn, hauled top soil, and a myriad of other things. I was grateful that my job was mostly helping with Daniel. When the day was over, the yard looked wonderful! That night I sat with Beth during her piano practicing and enjoyed that one-on-one time with her. She is catching on so quickly to the notes and timing and the session gave me some time to praise and encourage her to continue.

On Wednesday morning Jenny drove me to the airport and I was soon winging my way home. I arrived about 7:00 Wednesday night. I had hired my lawn mowed while I was gone and returned to find it looking good but littered with branches from my wind break. My neighbor brought over my mail later that night and said that 50 mph winds came through on Tuesday and that I was fortunate that my patio furniture hadn't taken flight. Thursday was cold and rainy and it gave me an opportunity to catch up on things. Friday dawned beautiful and I spent the day putting in my flower garden and enjoyed having SaraKay home. While she attended a Cedar Badge training Saturday morning, I got the lawn mowed and did some other outside chores. She had a busy day catching up on homework and practicing and I enjoyed the beautiful weather.

On Thursday morning the American Monument people installed Daddy's headstone. It was sweet to see the headstone standing next to Allan and Barbara's. I had it constructed the exact height as theirs so that it represented Daddy as their equal (quite a feat considering their legacy). It sits less than a foot from the other headstone and on

resurrection morning Grandpa can arise and have Daddy arise at his side. That's a wonderful thought. Seeing the lettering on the headstone did seem rather final though, and somehow is driving home the point that Daddy is really gone, despite my efforts to keep him around a while longer by not altering his office, his dresser and closet or his tools in the garage. I guess it's only natural for me to long to go back and recapture some of the precious times together. I suspect I will have a thousand of those moments these next few years but the love of my family and friends continues to give me the support and courage to move ahead and not spend too much time looking back. Of course, sweet memories also sustain me and give me hope of a joyous reunion so that part of looking back is okay and I'm grateful that our marriage was a good one and that memories are sweet.

May 26, 2009

I've had a busy morning. SaraKay left for BYU-I after spending a fairly miserable couple of days in bed with the flu. She started throwing up about midnight on Saturday night and continued about every half hour for the next 10 hours. I called our home teacher, Nick Barnard, and he and Farrell Wray came and administered to her before they attended ward council at 7:00 a.m. She was really sick most of the day but things eased up towards evening. I debated whether to call Stephani, Shauntel, and Mike and tell them we had the flu bug, but I got SaraKay into my bedroom, had her use my bathroom, and she never came out until the last of the company left Monday afternoon. Hopefully none of our guests will be the worse for wear for being here. SaraKay was going to go back to Rexburg yesterday but decided to stick around here and hope she was recovered enough to head back today. Fortunately, it is a vacation day for the BYU-I students and she didn't have to miss any school.

I was happy to have the Memorial Day holiday spent with family. When SaraKay arrived home Friday night she and I went to the cemetery and decorated Grandpa and Grandma Larsen's and Daddy's graves. It's sweet to have them there together and I was glad SaraKay had some private time to shed some tears and pay homage to her dad. She spent Saturday doing homework and I spent the day mowing and sprucing up the yard. I haven't been home enough lately to keep pace with the demands around here so it was a pretty exhausting day for me.

On Sunday afternoon Stephani and Josh arrived. They were here before the other families arrived and it was fun to hear the details of their weekend. I had been with them on Tuesday for Sam's last concert of the year. It was so fun to be to the concert, see Sam's friends, and just enjoy watching him perform. On one number he was featured on his oboe and with the jazz band he played the tenor sax. He is quite the musician and has served as president of the marching and symphonic bands this past year. I was so impressed with their band program and could tell that the kids took a lot of pride in it. On Saturday night he had a date to the Senior Ball and Stephani and Lin were the host family for the dinner before the dance. Lin had put a lot of effort into getting the yard spiffed up and Stephani was running around preparing things for the big night. Although the weather didn't fully cooperate, they set up canopies and the couples all were able to enjoy dinner on the deck.

Sunday morning in their Hyde Park Ward the graduating seniors spoke in sacrament meeting and Stephani commented on what proud parents they were to have Sam on the program. That afternoon Josh was called to serve as the teacher's quorum president so by Sunday afternoon they were all pretty frazzled and ready to kick back. I appreciated that Josh brought his cello with him and I had a private recital here Sunday afternoon. Steph accompanies him and it was sweet to hear "Love One Another" featuring the cello. Josh auditioned and got into the Cache Valley Symphony so he was excited about that.

Shauntel and kids arrived a while later and Mike and Marci got here about 6:30. Most of us made a trip to the cemetery and that was sweet to share with the kids. Although I am having part of the monument redone, it still looks very nice. The cemetery was ablaze with color and beautiful flowers and although there was a huge crowd, it still was very sweet and peaceful. Somehow in the middle of a very windy and rainy day, our visit just happened to occur when the sun was shining and it was warm and pleasant. Stephani and Josh left soon thereafter for home and the rest of us visited and enjoyed being together.

Monday dawned warm and beautiful and we enjoyed a leisurely morning with the kids playing on the trampoline and swings. After lunch Shauntel and kids left for Idaho Falls to visit their Grandma Marilyn, and Mike and Marci left for Pocatello to do some shopping at the mall. Because of the wet Sunday we had had, Mike

couldn't get the garden rototilled so I am going to address that this week before I leave on Friday for Mother's Week at BYU-I.

On Wednesday of last week, I spent part of the day with Shauntel and then headed for Deniece's. She and I spent that evening and most of Thursday working on the picture book we have been preparing for Grandpa and Grandma's time in Pakistan. I am still a way off from having the journals ready for the press but Deniece is accomplished on the computer and between the two of us we got most of the project finished. She called today and had run into a few glitches, but between the two of us we made decisions and got it submitted. She was pretty tenacious and a great asset, and Don and Carolee were so good to leave us alone and just let us hammer out the details. I had spent enough time with Grandma's journals that I knew what the pictures were and hopefully got the right picture with the right text. It is such a relief to get this done and get the journals submitted soon. John has been invaluable to me.

I've spent the day working in the yard. It has been very pleasant. My life is good. I have my moments as I know all of you do but the Lord is blessing me and life moves ahead. I'm so grateful for each of you and your efforts to keep in touch and to offer encouragement and support.

June 1, 2009

I returned late last night from my Mother's Weekend at BYU-Idaho. I left Friday afternoon and spent time in Idaho Falls and Rexburg shopping and taking care of errands, arriving at SaraKay's about 5:30. She returned from campus about six and we left soon thereafter for her concert in the Snow Building. It was the university orchestra as well as the Collegiate Singers, and Men and Women's choirs. It was so wonderful! SaraKay hadn't picked up tickets in advance and when we went to the ticket window, they were sold out so I ended up standing in the standby line for a while until someone who had an extra ticket came by and offered to sell their extra one to me. Since I was alone and they were selling just one ticket, I was able to buy it and get in to the concert although the entire standby line eventually got in. I guess the patrons with season tickets don't always show and so those tickets are given to others at about 15 minutes before performance time. I was pleasantly surprised that my ticket put me sitting by Rhonda, Shannon, and Alyssa Butt as well as Colleen and Angela Winder. How lucky can I get! Anyway, the performance was beautiful and I sat in awe for the entire hour and a half. Following the concert, we visited in the main foyer and saw several more people from the Blackfoot area.

When we returned home, I was tired and so I went upstairs to bed (I took SaraKay's bed and she used a sleeping bag on the floor. Her roommate's mom wasn't spending the night so we had plenty of room in the bedroom for the three of us. We had the window open to pull in some cool air and despite my best efforts to fall asleep, the noise from the street below and all the apartments was so great that I couldn't get to sleep. By the time SaraKay and Aimee came to bed at 1:00 I was still lying there trying to shut out the noise. About that time things seemed to settle down and we all had a good night's sleep.

Saturday morning, we attended three very interesting seminars. It was a surprise to find that one of the sessions was presented by Candice Harrington Shupe. It was so fun to sit in on that session and to enjoy hearing from her. We thoroughly enjoyed the seminars and hurried home for lunch before SaraKay left to do homework and I took in a session at the Rexburg Temple. Although I attended the open house, it was really my first experience going through since its dedication and it was very sweet to be there. The only problem I had was keeping awake since I had only gotten five hours of sleep the night before. The session was filled to capacity; in fact, I spent most of the time sitting on the men's side it was so crowded. I think there were several other mothers who had the same idea.

The person who conducted the session was a very young man (maybe 22-24) and it seemed so strange to see someone that young up at the front, but he did a great job. There were lots of young couples there and I couldn't help thinking what a blessing the temple is for the students in the area as well as the full-time residents. Many of the "mothers" and most of the young couples needed help at the veil and I happened to rotate into the very last seat and so I was the last person through the veil and I waited nearly a half hour in the Terrestrial room before advancing. But I was in no rush and I was grateful for the time to meditate about the blessings I enjoy.

One of my favorite parts of the endowment is the dialogue at the veil, and I can never say it without marveling at the magnificent promises that we are given if we live worthy of them. One of the hardest

things for me about having Daddy gone is that I can't talk through things with him. Daddy was good to let me express my concerns and he often had good counsel for me. I've missed that interaction and counsel so much. But I realize that the endowment empowers me to do the work required in this life and the promised blessings on my posterity are certainly something I hang on to.

Saturday night we attended a concert of William Joseph, a famous pianist, composer. It was absolutely phenomenal! He was accompanied by a percussionist, a violinist, and a cellist; the music really was out of this world. What a treat to share that with SaraKay. After the concert we sat on one of the benches by the Snow Building and just visited about Daddy, the temple, SaraKay, and her impressions since Dad died. I was grateful for that time and feel like she is doing fine and successfully getting through her adjustment.

Sunday morning was leisurely since their ward meets at 1:30. I met many of SaraKay's good friends and even scouted out some of the guys that she wanted my opinion on. It was fun to put a name with a face and that gave us a lot of talk material later. That evening the Women's Choir sang for the Exemplary Womanhood Award Fireside in which Bonnie Parkin was honored and spoke. Later we visited in the beautiful summer evening with others from our community and also SaraKay's two frisbee coaches. What a fun night! I returned home about 10:00 and dropped into bed.

I've spent the day working on centerpieces for the ward fundraiser dinner next Tuesday and just catching up on things around here. Tomorrow I will be in Logan for Sam's graduation. It's an exciting time for him and his parents and I'm grateful to be a part of it!

Tim arrived home safely Sunday night from a fun stay with Becky and family in Chandler. I haven't had a chance to check-in with most of you but hopefully things are going well for you. I know summer recess from school looms on the horizon. How I used to dread it with all the crazy schedules, late bedtimes, three big meals a day, and the doors constantly opening and closing and all the mess and chaos. I felt like I was going to have a nervous breakdown those first few days but then we settled in and the summer flew by all too quickly. Keep in touch.

June 10, 2009

Last Tuesday I drove to Logan and spent a fun afternoon and evening with the Bennions for Sam's graduation. The event was held on USU campus at 3:00 p.m. and was very festive and impressive. Sam graduated with a class of 500+ students and has been blessed to have a great group of kids as friends throughout his high school years. He is going to be working this summer and then attend USU for a year before mission time. He is on full scholarship and will be living at home to save for his mission. I was so grateful to be there with him for this special event and appreciate all he has accomplished.

Following graduation, we had a delicious dinner with Lin cooking their famous 7Up chicken on the grill. Bonnie brought most of their family and joined us for the dinner but Steve had other commitments with his scout troop and Shauntel was unable to come because of sick kids.

Towards evening huge black clouds started rolling in the length of the valley. Stephani invited me to spend the night but I thought I could drive out of the storm and so I left about 7:30 for home. I usually will go through Preston whenever I visit Steph because it is quicker than the interstate. Well, I started for home and soon was driving in a huge downpour. Fortunately, traffic was light and I took my time and kept coming. The stretch between Preston and Downata was especially challenging since a lightning storm was lighting up the sky. At one point it struck so close that it really jolted the car with its impact and rattled my windows. It was so scary! For a while I was thinking I should have stayed in Logan for the night but eventually (at Fort Hall) I drove out of the storm and made my way home. It had taken me an additional hour.

That was the beginning of bad weather that seemed to follow me home from Cache Valley. Throughout the rest of the week, it continued raining. One afternoon the sky had been looking especially ominous and all at once I heard this huge pounding. I ran to the back patio doors just as a hail storm hit. It was coming with such fury that I feared that my new patio doors were going to be broken. I rushed to get a large blanket and opened the door long enough to drape it over the top and down over the glass before closing the door and securing the blanket in the door jam. It hailed ping pong sized hailstones for several minutes. Then it quieted and the rains resumed. When the damage in our

area was assessed, many residents had lost their new gardens, had their lilac bushes stripped, had windows broken, and even had window screens punctured. I felt so fortunate that my siding didn't get pocked. One member of our ward had her willow tree blown over onto two cars sitting in her driveway. One was totaled and the other will need extensive work. I felt so fortunate. I think one major reason that I didn't have as much damage was that the storm came from the west and my wind break protected me from a lot of the storm's fury. These trees in my back yard have really been a boon to me.

Later in the week another hail storm hit and this time I didn't fare as well. The tree in the garden area had a branch break off and fall into the garden area. It has been so rainy that I haven't been out to assess the situation until yesterday. I took my little saw that I cut up the pine tree with and thought I was going to easily saw off the branch and throw it into the wood bin. Well, that small branch turned out to be about 9 inches in diameter and I soon realized that I was going to have to saw off the small branches and work my way up to the place on the trunk where it was stripped from the trunk. I started about 9:30 and was still sawing and hauling at 11:00 when Marilyn Fresh and her grandkids pulled up and asked if I needed some help. I admitted that it was more of a job than I had thought it was going to be and they went home for their chain saw and were soon back. Buddy made short work of the branch and soon it was all in the wood bin and finished.

In the process of that project Marilyn asked about my garden area. I mentioned that I had planted grass in half of it and was trying to get my small tiller running so that the other half didn't take so much man-power to keep weed free. She said that she has a riding tiller and that if I needed Buddy to come till for me that that would be an option. I offered to pay for the service and she said just to pay for the gas that it takes but I think that I can work something out with Buddy that will be beneficial to us both. Anyway, I felt like my prayers had been answered on two counts and that now if my grass doesn't grow, I can hire my garden rototilled and not have it break the bank.

Another challenge I had was trying to keep the garden area wet after I got the area seeded. I manipulated the sprinkler system box and thought that I had it all set but when I got up the next morning, I could see that I still had a station running and that I had done something wrong. I read and reread the instructions but there were just too many things I didn't understand and eventually I called Matt Reid and he came and reset it and tried to help me "think like a sprinkler system," as Daddy would say. He was so kind and sweet about it. I couldn't help thinking how we cast our bread upon the waters and sooner or later it seems to flow back to us, buttered. You older children will remember when we lived on the desert that Linda Reid lived in that little house to the southwest of our farm. Many were the times we drove there to get the kids for Primary or to take them to Sunday School and do other favors for them since they often needed assistance. Who would have guessed that little Matt would one day be doing me a favor and coming over here to help me with my challenges?

On Thursday I went to the temple with Connie Bingham. She had stopped when she saw me in the garden and asked if I would like to go with her. I have tried to go each week and so I agreed and she came about noon on Friday and picked me up. She has been a widow now for about 25 years and never remarried. We have so much shared history that it was wonderful to catch up on our families and other news. She shared a lot of experiences she had as a very young widow and shed some tears. I asked her, "Does it ever stop hurting? Do you ever stop missing your spouse? She assured me that it gets more manageable but it's always lonely. That was kind of depressing. Later when Brenda Godfrey was visiting with me, she commented that her children fill a lot of the void left by losing Lyle and that's been my experience, too. It's not the same but it helps immensely to have contact with all of you.

Last night was our big YW/YM fundraiser. We had a western dinner and square/round dance after the meal. My committee was in charge of making potato salad for 150 and decorating the tables. We were going to have centerpieces of lilacs since Marlene Acevedo offered hers and we thought it would be really "down home" cute. Well, after the frost last month and the hail this month, there was not hardly a lilac bush in the area that had blossoms remaining so we did a quick change of plans and used the snowball blossoms off of the bushes at the church. Yes, I did get permission and they looked so pretty on the tables although they don't have nearly the wonderful fragrance that the lilacs would have had. I was grateful to have the event over and to have it so well attended. We set tables for 150 and had nearly every table full. When it came

time for the square dancing, I asked Janet to dance with me since her husband wasn't there and soon we had several odd couples as well as couples of all ages and sizes participating and had a great time dancing to "Oh, Johnny, Oh" and the "Virginia Reel." We had such a great time that we could hardly get people to go home. The Primary children, a few of the teens and all us adults joined in the fun. Best go. Need to get some stuff done. Life is good here at 80 N 740 West in Moreland, Idaho. Not perfect, but good.

June 15, 2009

I spent the morning attending missionary meetings. I drove early this morning to Pocatello for the farewell of Aaron Kirkham who was the young man whose father spoke at Daddy's funeral and who has had major responsibilities at Cedar Badge for the last several years. His father, Kirk, sat by me during sacrament meeting and we had a little time to visit before the meeting started. He said that he has been involved with Cedar Badge for the last seventeen years and that under Daddy's leadership our Council's program has grown from one week to three weeks. This summer the council executive assigned three professionals to each take one week instead of Daddy and his volunteers handling all three. It was just too much of a load and too much time to ask of the volunteers. Well, today Kirk told me that everyone is really struggling with how the preparations are going. He said that the three men who replaced Daddy aren't doing nearly as much as Daddy did and it has been a very difficult time trying to sort out who does what. He said that Daddy just picked up so much of the work load and no one really realized just how much he did until now.

Aaron spoke about "building relationships" and mentioned several people that had influenced his life because they "built" him through their service and example. One of the examples he used was Daddy. That was very touching. Aaron is a fine young man and will be a great missionary. He is going to the Washington D.C. mission.

The other meeting I attended was for Jake Hansen, Zac's brother. Jake served in one of the Puerto Rico missions. Peggy, his mom, called and invited me and I really enjoyed attending that ward and seeing so many friends. Mindy and Roger sat right in front of me and several friends from the old Moreland Second Ward were there. It's hard to believe that in a year Zac will be returning.

Our weather continues to be rainy and unsettled. We have had several storms move through and everything is green and lush. I've been grateful for my family history work, especially since I've been home-bound for several days when the rain kept me from working in the yard. I'm moving along with my journal project but it is slower and more difficult than I ever dreamed it would be. The biggest problem is deciding how much restructuring of sentences I can do and still maintain the integrity of the document. I've decided that if the meaning is unclear because of the run-on sentences, I add punctuation to try to clarify, but if the meaning comes through, I keep the words just as they are even if the sentences aren't grammatically correct. I keep wondering if Dad is looking down from heaven each time, I make an adjustment and saying, "Sis, is this your journal or mine?" Hopefully both he and Mom will be pleased with the finished product.

They announced today in sacrament meeting that our temple will be closed until July 5th. I've been to the temple every week since Daddy died and it has been a sweet island of peace and a haven for me in accepting Dad's death.

Mike has three days of Youth Conference that Marci can't participate in due to her pregnancy so I am going to go keep her company on Friday and Saturday and spend the weekend in Burley and Boise. She's a trooper. I thought it would be good to not be home alone on Father's Day. It's bound to be a little teary.

Last Friday I made a trip to Rexburg to watch SaraKay play ultimate frisbee on her intermural team. I also had other errands to run so I lumped all my errands together and could be there for one of her last games. As I sat watching the game, couldn't help feeling a little displaced surrounded by all the young students. It's a world I feel so removed from right now. In fact, one of the hardest things about Daddy's death is figuring out my role and place. It's been a little unnerving. I am looking for that "window" that opens when one "door closes" and trying to appreciate the pluses of this new stage of life.

P.S. Staff and Kaye dropped by enroute to Missoula, Montana where Staff has a work assignment and Kaye is going to spend the week with a daughter. They both looked so happy and it was fun to visit. Staff responded to my email asking if any of Dad's brothers could use any of his sport coats, dress shoes, or slacks. Staff has lost so much weight that he couldn't use any,

but I appreciated him checking in with me. I know Joaquin can use them and I may need to just take them to him. He probably has as much need as anyone.

June 22, 2009

I just returned this evening from a wonderful weekend with the Burley/Boise bunch. I have been dreading Father's Day and didn't want to be here alone but at the same time, I didn't want to go far since I've been busy the last several weeks. I decided to call Mike and Marci and see if I could camp out at their place. Marci mentioned that Mike was chaperoning his stake's youth conference on Thursday-Saturday and she was going to be alone and would love to have me come. When I realized that Mike would be gone, I decided to go a little early and spend Friday night with her as well as Saturday. A couple of days later David called and said that he had been called to be a counselor in the bishopric and wondered if there was any way that I could come for his ordination. He said that the stake president had invited him to ask anyone he wanted to ordain him and he immediately thought of Steve. Both Steve and Mike had their dad ordain them high priests and David felt badly that he wouldn't have that honor. Well, this phone call started things in motion and plans were made for Steve and some of his kids to meet me in Burley Saturday evening and we would drive together to Dave and Andrea's, spend the night, attend David's meeting, celebrate Father's Day with them, and return home Sunday evening.

It was so fun to get to spend some time with Amber and Ellie and give Marci a little break. She is due to have her baby the 15th of July and she is finally looking like she really is pregnant. She is starting to have some pain in her hips and it's getting hard to get around. I was grateful that I could help out a little there and really enjoyed the chance to be with them. Mike returned from the Youth Conference pretty worn out but said that it was a great conference and he felt that it really strengthened testimonies.

While I was with Mike and Marci, I received a phone call from Jonie informing me that Corey had gone into premature labor (32 weeks) and has been hospitalized to try to give the baby time to mature. Corey has the same condition Jonie developed before Alex was born and the reason the Alex was a preemie and had to be life flighted to Fargo to be cared for in that hospital. Jonie said that she would keep us all updated about the situation and I assured her that we would keep Corey in our prayers.

About 4:30 on Saturday, Steve, Rachel, Jared, and Anne Marie arrived from Idaho Falls where they had been attending a Morris and Jean Benson reunion. Rachel and Chrissy had just returned from their stake's girl's camp and Nate was at Cedar Badge, and so Bonnie went back to Logan to be there when Nate got home Saturday afternoon. After a delicious meal of soup and calzones with Mike and Marci, we headed for Boise, arriving about 9:00 p.m. Tim also arrived about that time and we had birthday cake and ice cream to celebrate the three birthdays (Tim, Steve, David).

We had a great time teasing Tim about his upcoming pioneer trek this next Thursday through Saturday. Tim is one of the main planners and leaders of the young adult stake trek and he is in charge of dividing up the ward members into families. He said that once people knew he was in charge of that, he has had all kinds of special requests and he has had to be pretty stern about letting people know that no special favors would be shown. He said that 47 girls are signed up and only 13 boys. We thought that sounded like a great situation for him but he reminded us that that meant the few boys that were going would have to do a lot of the heavy pushing and pulling. Well, he didn't get much sympathy from us; we were too busy advising him on how to make the most of this three-day opportunity. Just a few hours in the wild certainly can reveal a lot about a person! Anyway, I'm excited to see how he gets along being the chief "Pa" of the trek.

After visiting until much too late, we headed to bed since meetings started at 9:30 the next morning. Because of almost non-stop planning meetings, Tim was only able to attend the sacrament meeting with us and he expressed to me later that he was so sorry that his meetings kept him from sharing the ordination experience with us. I think we all are comforted by being together and it is one thing we all yearn for to help with this healing process.

Following sacrament meeting Steve and I with his three and David and Andrea with their four (Laurel and Anna are in Manti participating with their Cottom cousins in the Manti pageant) all joined the bishopric and stake presidency for the ordination. The stake president invited Steve to be voice for the ordination and he did a beautiful job. He quoted from the Oath and Covenant of

the Priesthood and related it to David and his new calling. At the closing he praised David for his personal righteousness and his worthiness to call down the powers of heaven because of his worthy life. It was pretty emotional and when it was over Steve and David had a teary embrace. The Spirit was certainly there in abundance. I had known it would be an emotional situation and had taken a clean handkerchief just in case. As the tears flowed, I was dabbing my eyes and trying to keep my emotions in check. Part way through the ordination Jared, who was sitting at my side, reached over and placed his hand on mine and held it there for the duration of the ordination in an attempt to comfort me. It was such a thoughtful thing to do and I was very touched.

I was thinking about my life as I drove home tonight and how for so many years I have been assisting and comforting and trying to "be there" for you kids and your growing families and yet in the last four months since Daddy's passing, I have felt those roles reversed and felt everyone's efforts to meet my needs and "be there" for me, both physically and emotionally as we all come to grips with Daddy's death. SaraKay commented that she had had a tough week with the approach of Father's Day and the finality of Daddy's absence from her life. I've had the same things going on with me and it's rather unnerving to realize that our lives stretch out before us with years of doing and becoming without his immediate input and presence.

In a recent blessing that SaraKay received from her college bishop in conjunction with a setting apart, she was told that the Holy Ghost had been her companion and that he was supporting her and blessing her even in the times that she didn't realize that he was aiding her. She was grateful for that knowledge and reassurance that the Lord was aware of her needs at this difficult time.

In one of the prayers offered this weekend, the sentiment was expressed that as a family we are grateful for the rich legacy Daddy left us and of his wonderful example of fatherhood. Several of you kids have visited with me lately about how he always greeted you with open arms and loving acceptance when you returned home with your own families for a visit. Those are sweet memories.

Recently Jean Esplin shared with me some of her experiences after her husband died after a prolonged battle with cancer. I think she was about 45 and still raising her family and she had to go to work and try to provide and her life was so difficult for so many years. She said that one morning she woke up and it dawned on her that she was happy, genuinely happy; that her life was good and she could see that her future would be bright even without Dalyle at her side. She reassured me that the gloom will be replaced with light eventually.

My experience has been a little different. I keep thinking of all the tender mercies such as that all of you children had your dad for your growing up years. Also that Daddy and I were prepared financially for a mission and hence I have "sufficient for my needs." We had 43 wonderful years together and rich experiences because of our adherence to the gospel. And of course, most of all, I feel grateful that the priesthood ordinances are in place and will enable us to be together again.

During the last five years when Daddy was so faithful in his exercise routine, he would get up at five and either go biking or go downstairs and walk on the treadmill or ride his stationary bike. When I would wake up at 6-6:30 I would usually feel his side of the bed with my arm even before my eyes were open. I've had a few mornings when I've found myself placing my arm over to his side of the bed, just checking for him and then suddenly realize that he's gone and won't be back anytime soon. That always leaves me a little melancholy but for the most part I awake in the morning happy to be alive and grateful for health and strength, a warm home, loving family, and friends, and a caring ward. I hope that each of you had a few moments this weekend to think about your dad and his love for you and that you continue to feel of his love and support.

June 29, 2009

Welcome home, sweet Kate! China's loss is our gain! We are so grateful for your safety and look forward to having you give us a detailed account of your adventures! FYI: Stephani and her stake are spending three days this week on their Trek. It has been a mammoth project for their stake YM and YW leaders and Steph has been in the thick of it. I'm sure life will settle down for the Bennions once this week is over! Tim's Trek was last Thursday, Friday, and Saturday and he said it was about as perfect an experience as their ward has ever had! Through many planned and some unplanned experiences, testimonies and

relationships were strengthened. I'm so grateful that it was successful.

It's a beautiful, hot summer day outside and finally the rainy spell is over. I didn't appreciate just how much rain we had received until I went to town last week and noticed that the river was nearly to the bottom of the bridge! It's higher than I remember it being for a long time and in many places the water has overflowed the banks and is running into nearby fields. Wow! I guess our water is secured for another year! As you can imagine, the three weeks of frequent rain in this dry and arid country has brought a green beauty to the usually grey landscape of sage brush and dry grass. Both on my trips to Logan and to Boise I was amazed at how much difference the rain had made and at how few sprinkler systems were running. What a bonus for the farmers this year! In one of the articles I read, it said that before the rains started the Palisades reservoir was at 60% and last week it peaked at 100%! They are trying to carefully let the water out the spillway so it doesn't go over the top, but with no one irrigating, all the water isn't being drawn off and the river is running high. It's such a testimony to me of the power of the forces of nature and at how dependent we are on the Lord's watch care.

I had a relatively quiet week until Thursday when I received a call from the youth leaders at the Treasure Mountain Scout Camp. They said that they were going to honor Dad at their graduation ceremony on Saturday and requested that I come to receive a gift in his behalf. I knew from an email that Steve forwarded from Kirk Kirkham that the two Cedar Badge courses had been flying the flag at half-mast in Dad's honor both weeks and so I decided to put aside my fears and just go. I carefully planned my trip on MapQuest and then at the last minute decided to go through Rexburg to run some errands first so I messed up my MapQuest instructions but I was still able to follow some sketchy directions I was given and drove right to it. The revised route took me through Driggs instead of going through Swan Valley and Victor. Although I never enjoy traveling alone, it was a truly spectacular sight driving east with the wooded hills against a backdrop of the Grand Tetons that were stunningly beautiful, snowcapped, and dominating! I had been listening to a book on CD for part of the trip but as I drove into that valley, I just had to turn the CD off and relish that marvelous scenery! Everything was so beautiful! The rain had greened everything and the rivers were running full and the underbrush lush. I've never been one to think that a person can worship as well on a mountain stream as in a cathedral but I came close to understanding that philosophy that morning as I took in the beauties around me.

When I arrived at camp about 11:30 I was met and escorted graciously to the area for the visitors. When they presented the colors and the Flags of Freedom, they had Joaquin escort me forward and they mentioned the service Daddy had given in the council and his role in promoting Cedar Badge so that under his leadership there are now three separate courses instead of just one. They gave me a set of five scout patches that showed an Eagle in flight and Dad's initials are embroidered on the eagle's wing. One patch has Daddy's name embroidered across the bottom in bold yellow lettering. These patches were presented to every staff member and every participant in 2009 and will be sold in the council stores. They gave me enough patches for all of you children, too. It was a rather teary moment to be surrounded by the beauties of nature and all of these faithful scout leaders who were so close to Daddy and who esteemed him so much.

Later, Nancy Farrer, the Chief Executive's wife, who spends the two weeks working in the commissary pulled me aside and shared a sweet experience that some of the leaders had earlier in the week. She said that one of the activities they do is to attend a campfire and to each take a turn, placing a log on the fire and to take a minute and mention someone who has positively affected their life. She said that Daddy had been mentioned multiple times but the climax of the evening was remarks made by Andy Bradbury who had been one of Daddy's best friends. Nancy said that as he completed his remarks, they all realized that standing very close to the group out in the open was a stately buck. He had a rack that was huge and for a few minutes in that quiet setting all the participants turned and watched him. She said it was just such a magical moment at the conclusion of the program and that then as quietly as he arrived, the deer wandered off into the woods. She said that she's not drawing anything supernatural from the experience but that they all sensed Daddy's presence and his pleasure that his work with Cedar Badge was being carried on.

I so appreciated her sharing that with me. People have been so kind to me and I share these things because I feel that these are stories that might

help you heal and appreciate that your dad and brother left a wonderful legacy for each of us.

Shauntel had attended an Anderson family get-together Saturday afternoon and left Camille with her Anderson cousins for the week and arrived that evening with her little troupe. It was so fun to open my front door and have Archie and Drake standing there with wide grins. The minute the door was open they waited for their obligatory "Grandma hug" and then bolted to play in the back yard. Little Kinzie, who went from walking to running in one fell swoop, was not far behind, running down the sidewalk while Shaunie started unloading the car. The kids are growing up so fast! We had a nice evening, visiting and getting the kids settled for the night and then Sunday they attended my meetings with me. It was fun to show off the kids and to attend Primary with Archie (I was substituting in the music). Partway through sacrament meeting Drake crawled up into my lap and wrapped up into a little ball and fell fast asleep. It was a bit of heaven! I had been holding Kinzie but she was one bundle of energy and could not hold still for even a moment. I guess Drake did great in nursery but Kinzie was so restless that Shauntel eventually left Relief Society, retrieved Drake from the nursery and walked home and was here when Archie and I arrived after the block of meetings. We had a pleasant afternoon and Shauntel even got in a much-needed nap before heading home. They will return later this week to get Camille and probably return home to attend the Cache Valley celebrations for the Fourth.

SaraKay has had several invitations for the upcoming holiday but she says her first choice is to come home, do her laundry, practice the piano and her voice for upcoming juries, and catch up on homework and sleep. Does that sound familiar to all of you other college kids? Anyway, that sounds great to me, too, so I'm settling in for a restful holiday. Hope all of you will have a chance to do some celebrating and find a moment to give thanks for the wonderful land in which we live and the freedoms we enjoy.

July 6, 2009

It's been a great week with the addition of a new grandbaby (Marci and Mike's) and great grandbaby (Jonie's daughter, Cory's)! As most of you are aware, Marci went into labor on Tuesday morning after her water broke. It took her a little while to figure out what was going on but then she promptly got on the phone with her doctor who told her to go to the hospital immediately. She then tried to reach Mike who was with the YW from his ward at the Badger Creek Camp. He had left his cell phone in his tent when his group left for the morning to learn to rappel and so Marci ended up calling the camp's emergency number and getting word to Mike to hurry home. She then called me to let me know that her neighbor was driving her to the hospital and that Amber and Ellie were being cared for. Since I had a speaking engagement that evening in Blackfoot, I couldn't leave until later Tuesday night but was able to get things done around here and leave about 9:00 p.m. for Burley.

Mike called about a half hour after Marci's initial phone call and he said that he was driving like a madman on dirt roads, trying his best to get to Burley before Marci was taken in for the c section. She was in labor but fortunately she didn't get into hard labor before Mike arrived about 11:30 and they took her in for the surgery. "Baby Girl" Larsen was born at about 11:45 and weighed 6 lbs. 9 oz. and was 19 inches long. She has brown hair and is darker than Amber but lighter than Ellie. Soon after birth it was discovered that she had pneumonia in her lungs and so she was transferred to the Twin Falls Hospital where she was put on antibiotics and a feeding tube. Marci has felt better this time than with her first two births and was permitted to come home on Friday although the baby is still in Twin Falls where they are trying now to get her feeding on a bottle. Mike has gone to Twin Falls each day to visit her and Saturday he and Marci both went and Marci held her for the first time since her birth five days earlier. As of this writing, her release date is uncertain but as Marci said, she wants to be sure that she is able to suck and get the nourishment she needs. The doctors have indicated that they believe the pneumonia is a result of her premature birth (21 days early) and they are optimistic about a full recovery. We're just grateful that she has good care and is given every opportunity to get better before arriving home.

Yesterday Marci's sister-in-law arrived to help as I came home Saturday night to spend the night with SaraKay who was home for the holiday weekend and then take care of some responsibilities I had on Sunday. Mike has this week off and hopefully the baby will come home soon.

It was a sweet experience for me to spend some time with the Burley Bunch. Amber and Ellie are sweet little girls and old enough to really be

fun. We went for stroller rides, visited a nearby park and spent hours swinging, played in a kiddie pool that Mike purchased for their back yard, blew bubbles, read books, had a tea party, did sidewalk chalk, rode bikes, and went for a ride in their new family van and watched Mulan on the built-in monitor. Just so you don't think it was all fun and games, I did do dishes, laundry, and fixed meals, and was reminded again of just how much energy it takes to care for a young family! Mike is good help and Marci was getting around a little better by the time I left on Saturday afternoon but I know the pace will pick up when the new little one arrives so I'm keeping close touch with them regarding if I need to come again.

On Saturday Jonie called and said that Cory had gone into labor and that she and Jeff were heading to the hospital with her. Jonie called a few hours later announcing the news that all had gone well and she had delivered a healthy little girl with lots of black curly hair! They would be bringing mother and baby home today. Jonie seemed tickled pink to have a Fourth of July grandbaby and that makes me a great grandmother for the second time.

My time with SaraKay was fun. We watched a movie (no, it wasn't worth recommending, "Lost in Austen," Jane Austen that is) and we ate Cheetos and watermelon and went to bed early and listened to all the fireworks. It was like the whole community was alive with explosions. I wondered if Frank Vandersloot had anyone attend his fireworks display in Idaho Falls this year because we certainly had our share of excitement right here in Moreland. My favorite Fourth of July activity was just having one-on-one time with SaraKay and talking through her upcoming finals, her love life, and her plans for the coming break. It will be good to have her home for a few months between semesters. She attended her singles branch on Sunday and enjoyed seeing her old friends again.

July 13, 2009

This past weekend was a busy and at times, an emotional one. Stephani and Katie arrived on Thursday and we got into the final preparations for the reunion. Prior to their arrival, I had determined to have them help me go through some of Daddy's personal belongings and decide what to keep and what to take to the reunion to be distributed among the children and grandchildren. As I have gone through this time of loss these last six months, I have often asked myself, "If I was the one who had died, how would Daddy be handling all of these decisions? How do I continue to honor Daddy and yet 'move on" with my life?'" Although sorting through Dad's things seemed like an invasion of his privacy, I knew that it must be done.

I remember my brother, Nate, expressing something after his son, Trent, died. As a little boy, Trent would often follow Nathan around in his woodworking shop. Nate had given him permission to use a little hammer and pound nails in the unfinished interior 2x4's of the shop. After Trent died and Nate went back to work, he kept coming across the nails that Trent had pounded and it pricked his heart each time he thought of his sweet little boy who now was gone from their life. I felt all weekend I was finding Dad's "nails" as we went through drawers and boxes and the physical "stuff" that attended his work, his church jobs, his leisure time activities, his wardrobe, and things that were "the tools of his trade."

I think Stephani and Katie would agree that it was an emotional experience as well as interesting and even humorous at times. We decided after going through box after box of scouting gifts and memorabilia that scouters are a sentimental bunch and love to express their gratitude through gifts. This project occupied us for Thursday and Friday before we had the task in hand.

On Friday night Lin and Josh arrived and then later Tim and we enjoyed the chance to be together and visit. The Bennions were invaluable to me as they helped in the yard and with equipment and dealt with the long list of computer tasks that needed their expertise. Lin is very handy and serviced my tillers, replaced florescent lights in my kitchen ceiling and advised me on a concern I had regarding my plumbing.

On Saturday morning we loaded their pickup with supplies for the reunion and sent them on their way home about noon. Stephani took my van for John and Laurel's use when they fly in on Friday and is helping with that. Today I am going through other things and trying to account for every eventuality of our upcoming reunion.

Tim came for his ten-year class reunion on Saturday and we had some time to visit. He has been dating a girl that he really likes (Whitney) and she will be able to come to the reunion for some of the activities; it will be a treat for all of us to get to meet her.

Before going to the class reunion, Tim commented that he was selling pest control when his five-year reunion was held so this was his first time coming back and seeing his class mates. He was wondering if he would enjoy it. I assured him that if he wasn't having a good time he could always leave right after the meal and just come home. When he didn't arrive home by 7:30 I figured that he must have found some friends and when he did arrive home at 9:30 he confirmed my suspicions. In fact, he had such a great time that he was one of the last to leave! As we visited about who was there and what was going on in everyone's lives, he commented that it was sweet to see how well his classmates were doing. He said that even some of the kids who weren't so much in the limelight in high school had done well for themselves and that it was nice to realize again that, "There is life after high school!"

Tim left about 8:00 Sunday morning for Boise, and SaraKay arrived about nine to attend my ward and hear McKay Reader report his mission. After our meeting she attended Sunday School with me and then came home to sleep until another meeting at 1:00 (Eric Young's farewell.) We had a little while that afternoon to visit before she attended the dinner at the Young's at five. She is anxious to finish up the next two weeks of school and be done for a while. She will be catching the Salt Lake Express on campus Monday afternoon to come to the reunion and return at 3:00 a.m. on Wednesday to take her finals and juries later that day. It's not ideal but we both agreed that she needs to be to as much of the reunion as she possibly can.

I'm hoping the weather permits me to get my yard work done before I leave on Saturday. I will be driving to Logan and shopping at Sam's Club with Stephani for groceries and then I will continue on to Heber and spend Saturday night and Sunday night with Becky's family and then finish the shopping Monday morning with Becky before checking in at the cabin at noon. I know that many of you have elaborate plans with all of your travel arrangements. Let’s keep each other in our prayers.

I just got off the phone with Mike and he was very upbeat about Marci's progress and recovery. Her sister-in-law helped last week and her sister, Lisa, has been there helping this past weekend. I know it has been a huge benefit to them during this time of adjustment. Mike said that they were working things out to attend a part of the reunion but as yet had not decided just what would work for them. I told him to do what was best for his young family and that we would love having them for whatever they felt they could do.

July 28, 2009

The reunion is over for another two years and the dust around here is settling. I have felt so grateful for many things these last few days: for favorable weather, for safety for everyone in their travels, for safety in all our activities, and especially for the wonderful time we shared at the cabin. Several weeks ago as Stephani and I were sorting through things, planning menus, loading Lin's pickup with equipment, and juggling cars, I was asking myself if it was going to be worth it to gather for the reunion, especially considering that we had all been together for Daddy's funeral. That question was answered with a resounding “Yes!” as the first of the bunch arrived at the cabin and the excitement began to grow. By the time we had all arrived it was truly wonderful. I was reminded again that we need each other and these reunions keep us connected as a family and foster the love and friendships among the cousins.

I again want to thank the Bennions for all their efforts to help with transporting equipment, for Stephani's careful planning of meals and menus and shopping for supplies and food and for everyone's help in preparation and clean-up of meals, for those who brought tents, cameras, water equipment, and everything else that people did to contribute to the success of the event.

Thank you, too, for your participation in the Gong Show, FHE, and the beautiful tributes to Dad in the insight session. It meant so much to me to hear your heartfelt responses and sentiments. It was very touching and truly a bit of heaven to see the depth of influence Daddy has had on our family and will continue to have through his righteous example. Be sure to tell your children "Thank You," too.

Hopefully you have each gotten on my Picasso account and seen the hundreds of pictures Don and Deniece took for us. I so appreciate their sacrifices to be with us Monday night and to meet the shuttle in Layton and bring SaraKay with them to Midway. I know that we will be forever grateful for the wonderful family group pictures they managed to get despite the large bunch and wiggling children. I also appreciated Uncle Gary's offer of his boating equipment and of how fun it was to have twin tubes to give more an opportunity to ride.

I've spent the last few days helping SaraKay get ready for her Cedar Badge week starting this Saturday. She is on staff and has had to get several items of clothing, a physical, and prepare several lessons for the week. She got home from BYU-I on Friday afternoon and it has taken her nearly the last three days to get moved back in and tie up loose ends from school. She attended the singles branch last Sunday and thought that there were quite a few cute "prospects" to keep things interesting. She seems grateful to take a break from the stresses of school and she will start work at Kesler's the Monday following her Cedar Badge week. It's good to have her around again; she really livens up my life. Last weekend she trimmed the lawn while I mowed and it was wonderful to not have to face it all myself.

I am going to close and get my scriptures read before I turn in for the night. I love each of you and count you each as a priceless treasure. My prayers continue with you in the challenges you face each day and the decisions you are making.

August 2, 2009

Here I am up early this morning and knowing that I have a long, hungry day before me since I forgot last night that it was Fast Sunday today and I was munching on popcorn and raspberries (courtesy of Stephani's patch) while I watched a movie on TV last night, "Red Eye." It was a thriller and really good! I don't know if they edit movies on TV but maybe I better not recommend it until I know what it was rated. Anyway, it helped to fill my evening.

SaraKay left yesterday morning for Cedar Badge. She was catching a ride with Christian Esplin and some other staffers so that we didn't all have the make the two-hour drive to Island Park Scout Camp. I promised her that I would attend the graduation ceremonies this next Saturday, though, so it will be a long day since we are also having our summer party for the ward on Saturday, the 8th, and so I'll drive two hours each way to Island Park and then on to Downata for the party. I can say that my biggest expense these past months has been for gas for the car since I have been on the go so much. Thank goodness for a good, reliable car and the resources to keep it running.

SaraKay and I drove to Burley on Wednesday to keep Marci and the girls company while Mike attended the priest's high adventure activity. Marci is still somewhat restricted in what she can do, especially in lifting Ellie. She has done so well this time with her recovery but I know how hard it is with three under three and we were happy to get to hold little Olivia as well as play with Amber and Ellie. SaraKay was good help, too, but we were both vying for time with Olivia. She is such a contented baby! We left for home a few hours before Mike returned so I'm assuming all went well with the activity or we would have heard otherwise. Marci's folks arrived home from their mission on Wednesday and so they will be going to Utah this weekend to see them.

SaraKay and I were able to get the yard done before she left and that is always a big help to me. I am working away at cleaning the garage and doing some other sorting. As I take care of my little "ranch," I have discovered why Daddy had so much "stuff" in the garage. Little by little I am using the chemicals, tools, and other odds and ends that I've found as I've sorted through things. My grass in the garden spot continues to grow and fill in and SaraKay tilled the garden area for me before we left for Burley so I'm feeling like things are looking fairly decent. The only thing I haven't gotten under control (aside from my emotions, that is) is the weed problem along the driveway and across the front of the property. There are some terribly noxious weeds that I (and my neighbors) am battling and they are almost resistant to RoundUp and 24D. I keep spraying but they just keep rebounding. The only consolation is that I have noticed everyone else is fighting the same battle as I am and are as ineffective as I am, too.

The weather here is beautiful, especially the mornings. I remind myself each year that these pleasant summer days are why I enjoy living in Idaho. As we drove to Burley, SaraKay said that she couldn't understand why some people thought Idaho wasn't a pretty state. I commented that Idaho has some of the most dramatic and gorgeous scenery of any place on earth but it has a lot of plain and drab places, too, unless you appreciate the cultivated fields and lava rock terrain. I especially love this time of year when the grain is golden, the spuds and beets are maturing, and the fields seem to stretch on forever. I love seeing the sprinkler systems spewing water and the desert blossoming as spring turns to summer and summer into fall. I think the Snake River Valley is so beautiful and I know that dedicated farmers have worked tirelessly to coax from the soil a bountiful harvest. I feel so fortunate to live here and to rub shoulders with the good, hearty people of Idaho!

Let me pass on some family news. Staff and Kaye are moving towards marriage; I'm so happy for them. Gary mentioned that Ryan has completed his doctorate and will be taking a position in Fargo, North Dakota. Lisa and Jason are in California now after he completed his doctorate. Congratulations to both of them. What an accomplishment! I continue to get upbeat letters from Kathy and Dick. They are loving their mission and learning to love beautiful Alaska! They say it is so gorgeous and wildlife is plentiful. The fishing and hunting are real draws for tourists and the most popular sports in the state. It's fun to get their letters and feel their love for the work and the people. Tim and Whitney continue to date and she was going to be in Boise this weekend so that he could meet her family and they could have some more time together.

August 10, 2009

This past week SaraKay was on staff at Cedar Badge at Island Park Scout Camp. She was totally without her computer (Facebook, email, etc.) and cell phone so I really missed hearing from her. On Wednesday night, after returning from a two-day hike (24 miles) she borrowed a phone from someone in camp and called to let me know that she was having a great time (despite a mild sprained ankle) and loving every minute of the experience! I was so happy to hear from her and although we just spoke for a few minutes, it put my mind at ease concerning her. Last year Cedar Badge had been hard for her and I was surprised when the leadership called her and asked if she could be on staff this year since one of the other staffers had to cancel.

Going to Cedar Badge is certainly a change of pace from her college studies and gave her a chance to meet a lot of new friends and remind herself that there is "life after music!" Because she was on a Venturing Crew, her week's experiences were different from the regular scouting groups. They had scheduled on Thursday to white water raft but because of bad weather, they cancelled out on that activity and instead spent the better part of the day at a resort in Jackson Hole, swimming, playing Frisbee and basketball and just having a wonderful time. She so seldom gets to play basketball that it was a real treat, especially when she feels like she can hold her own against the boys. Usually in those situations she is one of the few girls participating and she said she was really "on" and even won two of the four games of "lightning" that were played.

I drove to the camp Saturday morning to attend the graduation and bring her home. I guess the leadership had checked with her and knew that I was coming so they didn't notify me ahead that they had plans to honor Daddy during the program. I felt a little unprepared, sitting on the back bench of the amphitheater when they asked me to come to the front and they presented me with another scout patch that was milled just for that occasion. They read a sweet tribute to him also and following the program I was again the recipient of many hugs and well wishes from all the many scouters who knew and admired Daddy.

It was also sweet to meet the adult and youth leaders and participants that had spent the week with SaraKay and had lots of praise for her and her contributions to the week's experiences. Dan Deakin, one of the professional scouters that Dad supervised, asked me to take a walk with him and SaraKay and I walked to a new camp a short way from the buildings and Dan told me that it had been decided that they would call it "Larsen Lair" in memory of Daddy. Close to Larsen Lair was a brand-new shower house with room for 12-14 persons to shower. This shower house had been one of Daddy's goals for that camp for many years since they had inadequate facilities and Dan wanted me to know that the project that Dad had cared so much about was getting completed. I was very touched by Dan's expressions and that Daddy was again being honored by his coworkers.

As SaraKay and I drove home she told me of her experiences and said that it was very healing for her to have so many of the leaders in camp familiar with her dad and take time to pay tribute to him. She said on Sunday there were two church services held, an LDS one and a non-denominational one. She was asked to be the pianist for both and at the first one the fellow conducting asked if she was related to Sue Larsen. She said yes, that I was her mother and he commented that he had served as a student body officer at Ricks College with me. It was Ron Hart, the student body president, who is a long-time scouter and presently a judge in the Soda Springs area who was conducting the services and it was fun for her to make that connection. Throughout the week she was present when others mentioned her dad and it continued to bring her comfort.

One of the things I did last week was to read a book that was given me months ago about the grieving process. I have been so busy that I hadn't gotten into it yet but it was really a good book

about the things that a person goes through at the time of a death of a loved one. A story was related in the book of a missionary who was in the field at the time of his mother's death and the decision was made that he would come home for the funeral and then return to the field. This he did and was able to share in the experience of the family gathering and the funeral proceedings. But, while the rest of the family who lived around the area continued to talk about the death and continued to receive love and support from the community and ward, he returned to the field where few knew of his loss and little comfort and support was forthcoming. When he returned home after completing his mission, the family was well on its way in the grieving process but he was just beginning and it made for a difficult time for him.

I have been thinking about this in light of the events of Dad's passing. Everywhere I go in this community I am surrounded by loving people who still take time to inquire as to my well-being and express their condolences. They asked about the family and continue to nurture and offer help. This has been so therapeutic for me; just knowing that people recognize that I am still fragile but working at getting myself stabilized. I mention this because I know that most of you are not in situations where you are getting the "strokes" that I am and yet I know that it is important for you to work through your grief, too. Hopefully you are able to find time with immediate family and close friends to do some talking and reminiscing about your feelings.

I had a very sweet experience last Wednesday that I want to share in closing. About three that afternoon the doorbell rang and it was our neighbor, Craig Trejo. He has been taking the missionary lessons and has wanted to be baptized for some time now but his parents have been fighting him on it. He has wanted so badly to be baptized that he was going to go ahead with it with or without his parents blessing. When he was getting ready for the interview, he learned that since he isn't 18 yet, he would have to have his parents' signature on a permission slip. He knew this was going to be difficult to acquire since his parents don't read or speak English very well and so he had come to ask if I would come to his home that evening and visit with his parents about his conversion and also to witness the signing of the document. I agreed.

That evening he called and said that his dad had just pulled into the yard from work and they were going to have a family meeting in the front yard with Craig, his brother, Ed, his parents, and me. I had baked a cake for the occasion and walked over, peace offering in hand. Craig and his dad were already very involved in a heated discussion so I just quietly handed the cake to Aurelia (his mom) and then I sat on the front steps with her while Craig and his father talked animatedly regarding the desire for baptism. It was all in Spanish so I only caught a few words here and there but it was obvious that his older brother, Ed, was defending Craig, and that Craig was determined to join the church. Although it was a bit awkward for me, nevertheless I sat and listened until at one point Ed translated for me and relayed to me what his parents' concerns were. I was there for about 45 minutes and hopefully able to defuse some of the emotions that were raging. Before I left for home Craig got his dad’s signature and Ed relayed to me that Joel and Aurelia wanted to let me know that they didn't hate the Mormon Church or its members but they just had loyalty to their own religion. They also said that the Hanni’s and Larsens had always been kind and good to their family and that it hadn't gone unnoticed and appreciated. They all gave me a hug and I went on my way back home.

All evening I couldn't help feeling close to tears for the experience. To be so involved in this drama had really shaken me. But the biggest response I had to the situation was a profound appreciation for Craig's determination, Ed's goodness in defending his younger brother, and Joel and Aurelia's concern over their son and their overriding love for him and his welfare. I felt like I stood on "holy ground" as I participated in the family discussion and saw up close the difficulty Craig has encountered as he’s investigated the Church.

Friday night I attended the baptism and it was so sweet! It was also interesting that Craig didn't want to make a big deal of the baptism and pack the house full of friends, so there were just a few of us who attended. Before the meeting started, two Castaneda boys (who we activated) walked in all spiffy in their white shirts and ties, four missionaries (all from either Mexico or South America), the Lopez family who the ward has just activated, and Craig's brother, Ed, also came. I commented to Jackie Alvarez that we were definitely in the minority! The services were very spiritual and I felt inspired by all that transpired. On Sunday Craig was confirmed, and although none of his family attended with him, he was there

looking so eager and handsome. What a joy for our ward to be a part of this conversion. There are few things that bring the joy that missionary work does!

Got a call from Tim last night. He had another wonderful weekend with Whitney and the two of them are falling in love I think and looking to make it official. I'll keep you posted on it. She's a lovely girl and seems to be a great fit for Tim. Maybe his search for his "one and only" has finally born fruit!

August 18, 2009

SaraKay had the day off today and we spent the morning baking rolls and making jam and getting some deliveries ready for some ward members. It was fun to have her here working with me although I know that she would rather be where there is more excitement. She is loving her job at Kesler's and is back into the swing of things at the singles branch, so those two things give her chances to socialize and that's what she wants right now. One of her best friends just got engaged and Karina Jenks just announced her engagement, so SaraKay is feeling like the old gang is breaking up; it's a little disconcerting.

The big news of the week was that I finished the Pakistan project and John is in the process of getting it published. He is very informed about this kind of thing and has been so helpful to me. The night I finished it up, I felt like a great weight had been lifted and every time I think about it, I have to smile. I never would have dreamed that it would have taken me this long but it's done and I think Mom and Dad would be pleased.

I attended a single adult party last Wednesday and felt so out of place that I was miserable. Shelda Belnap, whose husband died last November, asked me after the event was over, "Does a person ever enjoy attending these events?" I was surprised that she was having the same experience as me. I probably will keep attending just for the fact that Marilyn Fresh is our ward's representative and I don't want to tell her "No" when she calls and invites me. It's funny. When I interact with others in my daily life, I don't feel like I'm that different than I was before Daddy died, but when I attend the singles activities, I feel "singled out" and isolated. There are very few my age at the activities and maybe that is another reason it is awkward for me. I was so glad to have it over.

We've had some unseasonable chilly weather the last couple of weeks, but it is supposed to warm up on Thursday and be good weather again. I certainly hope so since we have rescheduled the ward summer party for the 25th and I don't want to cancel again. We have had to go back and get new sign-ups, put out new fliers and redo our plans and it has been a bother. We are having a backyard barbeque at the Acevedo's and letting the Primary children swim in their pool. Our numbers have swelled with the party being close at hand and I think in the long run we are going to have a bigger crowd than we would have had at Downata. Our ward has a lot of older people whose families are raised and these ward members would rather stay close to home. I guess we'll see how this works and plan accordingly.

I just received a sweet phone call from Staff with the exciting news that he and Kaye are engaged and will be getting married on September 26th at her home in Lehi. He was so happy and wanted me to let my kids know the news. Jimmy and Angel have been in Utah for a few days to visit Kaye and Staff as well as Angel's family and to bless baby number two. It has been fun to have Kaye be a part of those festivities.

The other good news is that Brock Kirwan (Maren's husband) has taken a teaching position at BYU and they have bought a home in Edgemont and will be living there in the Provo area. I'm sure Jeanie and Scott are pleased with having some family in Utah again. It was nice when Maren and Christian were in Salt Lake and it gave us a few more opportunities to see the Gentry's so I am thrilled about it, too. I know Mike and Tim have season tickets to BYU's football games so I suspect that they will find a way to see the Kirwan's since Mike and Marci have stayed in touch with them over the years.

Other extended family news includes that Tim was invited to dinner at JoEllen and Sean's place. They are now living in the Boise area where he is doing a residency at St. Luke's hospital. It was a fun evening and both Tim and JoEllen agreed that they need to play some tennis since they both enjoy the game so much. It was the first time that Tim had had a chance to get acquainted with Sean and he thought he was certainly an impressive young man. What fun for the cousins!

August 23, 2009

It's raining outside tonight. We've had a week of hot weather and have rescheduled our ward party

for this Tuesday so hopefully it will get this bad weather out of its system before our party. Since moving the party to Acevedo's we've had a rousing sign-up and it's proven to be a blessing. Also, today they announced that we will be getting a new bishopric next week so I guess we can use this party as a goodbye to Bishop Goodwin. He has been such a great bishop! And, no, I'm not going to speculate about who his replacement will be. (Although I do have a pretty strong suspicion!)

It's been fun to have SaraKay back in my life. She brings a lot of energy into this quiet house. Last night she had a party and they were still going strong at 1:00 a.m., so I had to yell out from the bedroom where I was trying to sleep, "SaraKay, It's late." The house cleared out rather quickly and I finally got to sleep at 2:00. She has some great friends and when they get together, they have a fun time. She is bemoaning that all the BYU kids and fall track BYU-I kids are heading back to school these next couple of weeks so things are going to thin out in the branch. Thank goodness she has the singles branch to keep her in touch with all the kids that are off-track. It really serves a purpose in her life. She is glad to be back to Kesler's and will come home from work and tell me about all the people she sees and gets to visit with. I just hope that in the midst of all her visiting she is also pleasing her employer! I think she is. Anyway, right now without the pressures of school and practicing life is just a bowl of cherries!

I'm getting acquainted with a whole new group of friends right now. They are the employees of the CAL-Ranch store in Blackfoot. Last week I went in and bought a new lawn mower (hand mower). Having never bought a mower before, I wasn't sure just what to look for but I knew Daddy trusted Honda so I told them that was the brand I wanted. The fellow who helped me could see that I was a little unsure of myself, but he talked it through with me and offered to get it out of the packaging, oiled up, and give me a quicky course on how to use it. I told him that I was a widow and really appreciated his patience with me and this purchase.

This week I went in to buy some huge nails to repair part of the pasture fence. The Ellis's horse and I have had a little game going on. I go out and reposition the cross rails in my split rail fence and after I leave, their horse goes over and rubs against the railing and knocks it out of the upright holes. Just the top one of three railings gets jarred loose but when I look out my kitchen window and see the top railing half way knocked out, I panic. Mind you, this horse has never tried to escape but just knowing that he could take one giant step and be free to roam the neighborhood gets my adrenaline flowing and so I go out and replace the rail (again!) He has two favorite places that he likes to knock down. Sometimes he rubs his bum (he must have an itch) and that is what jockeys the railing loose but I really think he "has my number" and just does it to irritate me. I have scolded him, railed (no pun intended) on him, and even tried to tie the railings with some baler twine (of which I have plenty), but to no avail.

Finally, I decided to be creative and just nail the rail to the post. I went in to CAL Ranch for the nails and found some that were gigantic. They were about six inches long! I knew that they would need to be long enough to go completely through both the rail and the post so I got some of the biggest ones in stock. The nails were in bulk and $2.29 was on the box. I wasn't sure about the price but I got four nails, thinking that they were pretty expensive and that four would do me. I had a gift card that I found among Daddy's belongings and when I went to the check stand I handed the lady the card and said that if there was enough on the card that I would pay for the nails with the gift card. She looked at me a little funny but proceeded to take the four nails, weigh them, and then she swiped the card and said, "The card had $20 dollars on it and your purchase was $.23 so you now have $19.77 left. I guess the nails were $2.29 a pound instead of apiece! I felt so stupid and could hardly get out the door before I broke into a complete belly laugh. I'm sure she was back at the cash register laughing her head off, too!

Anyway, CAL-Ranch and I are getting to be good buddies and I can see that they might quickly become one of my favorite places to shop. Running this acreage certainly has given me new respect for Daddy's tools in the garage and for all it takes to keep things in good repair. It's nice to have SaraKay helping with the yard and I think we've pretty much kept up with things. My neighbor Brent sprayed along the front of the yard when he was spraying his place and it really got a good kill on some of the terrible noxious weeds that my sprayer just hasn't been able to kill. Brent is good to look after me. I've had a few comments on the grass growing in the garden area but it has certainly been easier to mow the grass than to have to till the area.

I've been on the phone with Tim and he was on his way home from Provo and some time with Whitney. He stayed with Skyler and Rachel and said that they were very good to him. Tim said to let the family know that the relationship is growing and that he will keep everyone in touch. Life is good here and the summer is drawing to a close. I can't believe that the fair (and Tiger Ear) is on the horizon! I went into the scout office to sign up for volunteering at the booth and the sign-up sheets were nearly bare! Don Scott is in panic mode worrying about not having the volunteers they need to keep the booth running. I don't think anyone really appreciated how much Daddy "beat the brush" to get all the shifts filled and Tiger Ears churned out!

August 31, 2009

It's a good thing that I did not speculate about our new bishop. I would have been wrong! Our new bishop is Mark Adams (who has been serving in the singles branch for the last couple of years) with Cordon Wray as first counselor and Dave Hansen as second. It was certainly an emotionally charged meeting but the wonderful thing about these changes is that everyone falls into line and the work moves ahead. It isn't hard to fall into line behind Bishop Adams. He is such a kind, good man and so loving and capable. And, we are delighted to have them back in the ward after their two-year absence. It was interesting, though. Some of the newer members of the ward didn't even know who he was because of his other calling and so it was quite a surprise all the way around.

All of Mark and Carol's children were at our meetings today to show support plus several of Cordon's siblings and I was substituting in a class that normally has four children and today I had ten! Luckily one of the little Adam's grandchildren was teary and didn't want to come to Primary without her mother, so Angie Adams (Richardson) came to class and helped me with the bunch. It was fun to have that touch with Angie and also her brother, Cody, who I haven't seen for quite a while. Life really moves on.

I failed to mention in last week’s letter that I had a sweet visit from Nate. In all my sorting through things in the garage I came upon some large clamps that I was pretty sure were Nate's from when he came to install our cabinets 28 years ago! I called him and he said that he was picking up some cabinets in Rexburg and would come to see me and check the clamps. He arrived about two in the afternoon and we had a very sweet visit. He confirmed that the clamps were his and I also gave him the old saw that my dad gave us when he was distributing his stuff prior to going into the rest home. It was a saw that Nate had worked with as a kid and I felt that he would use it and appreciate it more than anyone.

It was nice for me to have some quiet one-on-one time with Nate. Spare time is a luxury with him being so busy as bishop as well as being self-employed and involved in numerous projects. It has been fun to receive Kathy and Dick's missionary letters and to have frequent touches with my other siblings as well as with Dad's. I'm looking forward to attending Staff and Kaye's wedding and seeing some of the Larsens at that event. I called Karen to discuss plans for the wedding and Josh answered and said that Karen and Jim were on their Egypt/Israel tour and wouldn't be home until the 19th. I'm sure they are having a great time!

I learned this week that Shauntel is running a 5K run on the 19th with the friend of hers that she has been exercising with. I knew they were walking each day but Shauntel never told me that she was training for a 5K. She said that the daily jog has made a big difference in how she feels and that she just hopes that once the race is over that she can continue with her regimen. Now that Camille is back in school it is going to be more of a challenge to find the time since Camille was such a good little babysitter for Kinzie and Drake. I'm sure proud of Shauntel and admire anyone that can do that. I tried to run once but got so winded by the time I got to the end of the driveway that I gave it up! I guess my daily walks at the church with Janet and Sharon will have to do for now.

This past week has been a fun one for SaraKay. She had a couple of dates with boys she was interested in and has some fun relationships with the employees at Kesler’s. All the kids who attend BYU and USU were trying to get in their last parties before leaving for parts south so there was a flurry of activity that made for a lot of late nights. I usually try to go to bed about 10, but of course I don't want to miss out on the "report" following the activity, so I've been a bit sleep deprived this week. I must admit it has been fun to have her friends back in the picture again after such a quiet house for so many months.

SaraKay and I will be leaving Sunday morning to go to Burley and join Mike and Marci for their baby

blessing at 11:00. Marci's parents and sister and her family are planning to attend and I know that any of you who can attend would be more than welcome. Sunday afternoon we'll continue on to Boise and have some time there, return to Burley to have SaraKay's dental work done, and then on home Tuesday morning so she can get back to work. It's fair week starting this Saturday and I've signed up to help during two shifts at the Tiger Ear Booth. It will be fun to be a part of that for another year.

Randy recently signed on with a hospital in Iowa City and will be starting work the middle of September so they are trying to get their home rented out so they can feel good about leaving it. These next few months will be busy ones for them. The fellow who will be Randy's boss is someone he knew while he was a resident there and so they already know each other which makes it nice. Randy and Shauntel both really liked Iowa and I think they are happy to be returning although we grandmas aren't as happy about having them so far away. One of the things about the job that is attractive is that Randy will be able to mentor some resident radiologists and he knows that he will enjoy that.

September 8, 2009

For the first time today, it is feeling like fall is in the air. We have had such unseasonably warm weather the past few weeks that it just hasn't seemed like it could possibly be September. On Saturday the Eastern Idaho State Fair opened and I put in a shift at the Tiger Ear Booth. It was enjoyable to see so many of Dad's coworkers and to rub shoulders with the volunteers and bring home a couple of "ears."

On Sunday morning SaraKay and I left for Burley, arriving about 10:30 and joining Mike and Marci for Olivia's blessing. Marci's parents, her brother and son, and her sister and her family as well as Steve, Rachel, Jared, and Anne Marie attended. Following the meeting we met at Mike and Marci's for a delicious meal and lots of good visiting. It was the first time I had seen Marci's parents since their return from their mission and it was obvious that they had enjoyed their time in Palmyra and the surrounding sites. Later that afternoon SaraKay and I drove on to Boise to spend the evening and part of Monday with Dave and Andrea and Tim.

Sunday evening we had some good visiting time and then Monday morning we relaxed and enjoyed the holiday. SaraKay, Laurel, and Anna went trail biking, Tim and David and Joseph played tennis, and the rest of us visited at the nearby playground and watched while the younger kids played. Later we enjoyed a delicious steak dinner, potatoes au gratin and fruit salad made mostly with home grown fruit. I don't know anyone who gets more mileage out of their small yard than Dave and Andrea. Andrea said that she still wishes they had more space so that they could grow more of their own vegetables, but I think they do very well with the set-up they have.

Tim has been taking tennis lessons and spent some time coaching Joseph, SaraKay, Laurel, and Anna.

Monday after dinner we left Boise and returned to Burley for an appointment with Dr. Mike. Since her insurance doesn't cover dental, SaraKay will be having her work done by Mike. We really appreciated his willingness to help us out. Their family had just returned from an outing rock climbing with Marci's siblings at City of Rocks and Mike took SaraKay and Amber to their garden to gather carrots, squash, corn, tomatoes, broccoli, and cucumbers that we feasted on for supper. They and another couple share a garden spot and it produces more than the two families can keep up with. It's wonderful to have all this fresh, organic food available this time of year and to see the results of all your labors over the summer. They sent home a bunch of vegetables for us, too, so we are enjoying the "fruits" without the labor this year.

Several of you have asked regarding Tim's romance with Whitney. They have both given a lot of time to the relationship, one or the other making the trip back and forth from Provo to Boise each weekend, but Tim has felt increasingly unsettled about it and finally this past weekend they decided that it just wasn't working. Breaking up is never easy, but after visiting with Tim about it, I could see that he had put a lot of time and effort into getting an answer and this was the best thing. Let me give a quick run-down on a few family happenings.

Katie has just completed her first couple of weeks at BYU and has been impressed with her classes, her ward, and roommates. Sam started at USU last week and is looking forward to turning 18. He still has a long year ahead of him before he's old enough to turn in mission papers but he's busy and making the most of his time. Stephani is teaching part-time and taking a college class so she has lots going on in her life.

Randy reports for his first day of work on September 14th at the VA Hospital in Iowa City. Their plan for the present is for Shauntel to stay in Smithfield until they can get things worked out with the house. This year Camille and Archie are both in school all day so her time has opened up a little bit. She will be running in the 5K on the 19 of September and continues to run almost daily.

Steve has been keeping his eyes and ears open for job openings in Cache Valley. His job with Assist is stable but he says he is ready to take on a new challenge. He continues to operate his two internet businesses besides being scoutmaster so he's got a lot on his plate. Bonnie's situation has stabilized but she still deals with some chronic pain and none of the doctor's seem to be able to figure out how to help her. (Jared told me on Sunday that when BYU played OK on Saturday that his mother was jumping up and down and screaming so much that they were all worried that she was going to reinjure her back!)

David has a new assignment with HP and he says it is really challenging him. Fortunately, he has a good working relationship with his manager and is being given the freedom and time to learn his duties and accomplish what needs to be done. Andrea is for the most part past her morning sickness and feeling stronger. The baby is due January 12th. Their house is certainly a beehive of activity these days with four in school and two toddlers keeping her busy at home.

Becky and Chet have been involved with J. Cole in getting some testing done regarding the Reactive Attachment Disorder. It has been so interesting and enlightening to see from a professional's viewpoint just what they are dealing with. The good news is that what they have been doing to this point has been correct and the therapist says that he feels like the prognosis and future look bright.

John played Mr. Mom for three days last week while Laurel was in Florida getting some training. She teaches classes at a health club in Canton and enjoys the chance to use some of her dance and fitness training. John seems to take it all in his stride and was doing a good job entertaining the kids in her absence. They start school this week and were excited about that.

Mike and Marci seem to have survived the transition to being parents now of three. They are adding all the trappings of parenting: a sand box, minivan, and training wheels for Amber's little bike.

Paul and Jenny are busy wrapping up the summer, harvesting their huge garden, making more home improvements, and surviving trips to the beach, camping, and other summer activities. Paul said that when Jenny called to wish her grandfather a happy birthday on Saturday evening that they were so busy watching the BYU-OK game that they asked her to call back. Paul seldom follows BYU football but he decided to turn on ESPN on his computer and so he watched the last four minutes of the game and said that it was a thriller!

Tim was on cloud 9 for most of the weekend after watching the game and said that he was almost hoarse from yelling. He and Mike have season tickets so he's hoping this season will prove to be as exciting as this first game. Tim is loving his new job at Scentsy and has been given some management opportunities that he is enjoying. So far the job as exceeded his expectations and been all that he had hoped for.

SaraKay is working at Kesler's and enjoying the social end of it as well as being happy to see her bank balance growing again. Due to our situation with Dad's passing, she will qualify for some Pell grant money which might enable her to go full time this next year instead of sitting out a fall semester to work. Most of her close friends are heading back to school this week at BYU-I so she's feeling a little down about that, but if the next few months go as quickly as August did, she will be back in Rexburg in a flash.

I got my riding mower back from Ralph Jensen on Thursday just as I was starting to mow the lawn. A belt that runs the blade mechanism broke and he had to hunt high and low to find a replacement so I've been without my big mower for the last three weeks. I have used the hand mower and between SaraKay and I we got the job done, but it was great to have my big mower back and cut my time in half. Ralph gave me some instructions regarding my new mower and showed me how to change the oil. He commented, "I'm going to make a mechanic out of you yet, Sue!" Well, both SaraKay and I have been a little more adventurous about solving our equipment problems lately. When we rototilled the garden area on Monday, we could see that we had a gas leak. We put our heads together and figured out where it was coming from and may have even solved the problem. That felt good.

Well, best close and get some supper on. It's a lot easier these days, especially when SaraKay takes her lunch to work and I eat alone. So… I'll just go cut a piece of bread, add some meat and mayo and wa-la! Supper is on.

September 14, 2009

Last Wednesday I was working at the Tiger Ear Booth and when I got in the car to come home, I noticed I had several phone messages. One was from a Sister Stears who asked me to return a call. Although I was feeling tired from my time at the fair, I called her and soon thereafter I was on my way to Idaho Falls for an interview with President Stoddard of the Idaho Falls Temple Presidency. He called me to be an ordinance worker for the Friday midday shift. I was thrilled! I know how my parents, Gary and Linda, and others have loved their time serving in the temple and I've always hoped that I would have that opportunity, too. I am on the same shift as Brenda Godfrey and we can travel together so that will work well for both of us! I went last night for a training session and I will be starting on October 9th, following my trip to Phoenix to visit Seely's.

Saturday night when I walked into the creation room of the temple where we were going to have our orientation, I had a sinking feeling for a few moments as I looked around for a place to sit and realized that most of the others present were sitting with their spouses! But I'm learning to deal with these occasional "alone" moments and I just walked up the aisle, found a seat and sat down confidently, like I wasn't giving it a thought!

Our meetings today were wonderful. Farrell and Tami Wray spoke on the Atonement and were so prepared and inspiring. Noel Tew sang a beautiful song on the Savior bearing our burdens and by meeting's end I felt lifted and renewed. Then we had a lesson in Sunday School on the Martin-Willie Handcart Company and on "saving souls." Nolan had asked several members of our ward to tell the stories of their ancestors who were a part of that company and it was amazing to realize what a legacy of faith was created for future generations during that difficult time. I think we sometimes forget that our trials and experiences are not only for us but for those who come after. I was reminded of how momentous our life decisions are when viewed in the eternal perspective.

Today Randy's nephew, Marcus, had his farewell in Blackfoot and so last night the Smithfield Andersons arrived about 9:30 to spend the night so they could be a part of the festivities today. By the time they got here, Archie, Drake, and Kinzie were asleep and we quickly transferred them to beds downstairs and then we had some time for visiting. One thing we did was have Camille play her violin for us. She has just recently started taking strings in school and she wanted SaraKay to play her violin and give her opinion on it. SaraKay worked in the missionary booth at the fair from 6-10 last night so she came home later and we added her to our "chat."

It was so pleasant to have some unrushed time with Randy and Shauntel. We discussed Randy's upcoming job and the details of their move. They have recently had a buyer come into the picture who seems to really like their Smithfield home and they are praying that they may be able to see it sold. It would certainly simplify their lives and finances and be a blessing.

It was nearly 12:30 before we said goodnight and headed to bed. Just before retiring, we were standing in Daddy's office and Drake came up the stairs, sleepy-eyed and disoriented. Randy picked him up and carried him back to bed without much fuss. I couldn't help thinking of a time several months ago when Shauntel was here and Drake awoke in the night with night terrors. He cried and cried and almost couldn't be consoled. Shauntel told me that he often would do that and they didn't know exactly why but they suspected that the trauma of the adoption, changing hands at such a formative time in his young life, may have been the root of his insecurities. I couldn't help thinking how far he has come because of the nurturing he has received and that his life will be eternally blessed because they have made him theirs through the gospel covenant!

This morning we were all rushing around trying to be ready for 9:00 meetings and I yelled out (to no one in particular) that we needed to have prayer before everyone left. Randy was carrying out luggage, Archie was hunting his shoes, Shauntel was making one final sweep of the house for any misplaced items, Camille was chasing Kinzie, and SaraKay was at the computer preparing her Relief Society lesson. Standing in the living room, surveying the chaos around me, I suggested to Shauntel that maybe due to time constraints they could have their prayer in the car. But, at that moment the universe all converged in our living room and we were able to kneel together as a family and have prayer. Before I had a chance to call on someone, Drake made it known that it was his turn and Randy looked pleadingly as if to say,

"Is there time for him to add his two-bits?" So, for a few brief moments Drake led us in family prayer. It was totally unprompted, heartfelt, and sincere and mostly in a dialect only Shauntel could interpret, but nevertheless, wonderful! It was like the heavens opened and the Lord smiled down on us and we arose from the prayer confident that His watch care is over us and He will continue to guide and strengthen! Who can doubt the prayer of a child!

I know that the last few months have been very difficult for Randy and Shauntel and that they have been in our thoughts and prayers as they worked to resolve the challenges they were facing. But it was obvious to me from our brief visit that they have been receiving inspiration and answers and that they will get through this "tough patch" and look back and be grateful for all the many tender mercies they have experienced.

I was thinking about a comment Shauntel made this morning as she and SaraKay and I were getting ready for our meetings. She told of how a friend in her ward had arrived at her doorstep one morning and said," I wondered if you would consider exercising with me each week and then running a 5K with me on September 19th. That is the day my baby would have been due and I don't want that day to come and me not have something meaningful to do to help me with the loss."

Well, Shauntel accepted the invitation and soon the two of them were walking and jogging several times a week. Shauntel said that the effect on her was immediate. She felt better physically and mentally and felt like she was better able to handle the daily stresses and the uncertainties of their situation. She said that it was so therapeutic to take that half hour a day just for herself and feel that she was doing something that enriched her. She said that when Daddy died, she felt like it was just one more difficult thing to deal with and she wasn't sure she could pull herself out of the sorrow and despair that she was feeling.

Then Shauntel said, "I feel like my friend saved my life with her invitation that day and in the months since!" What a beautiful testimony of the power of the one to reach out and touch someone else who has a need, too.

I know that I have mentioned this before, but one of the most difficult aspects of Daddy's death is the concern I have for each of you children and the effect the loss has had on you. Living apart as we do, it is harder to carry one another's burdens and especially when we don't completely understand what each of us may be feeling. When Shauntel mentioned her friend and her saving influence, I felt that the Lord, knowing all things, prepared a way for Shauntel to receive the help she needed at that time. I pray that that is the case for each of you as you work through your feelings over Dad's death.

I love each of you and pray that your prayers are being answered, that your lives are full and rich, and that you are finding joy in the journey.

September 29, 2009

Congratulations to Shauntel for her completion of the 5K! Unbeknownst to her, Mike, Tim, Steve, and Bonnie and their five, and Stephani were all waiting at the finish line as she came across. Randy, the kids, and his mom also were there and it proved to be a sweet experience for her to have the support of so many of her siblings and extended family.

I've had a great weekend, complete with lots of opportunity to connect with old friends and classmates and to renew those acquaintances. On Friday, Jane, Louise, Annette, and Carol all arrived and we shared supper and then retired to the backyard swings to visit until it was so dark that we were forced to come inside. It has been unseasonably warm and the evening was so pleasant. All of them arrived around 5:30-6 and it felt wonderful to have the time to visit leisurely and catch up on each other's lives. (Renee is presently serving a mission in Salt Lake in the Correlation Department and didn't come.) Normally we do our annual "slumber party" in June, but Louise was going east to meet her husband who had been serving in Iraq for a year and Annette was welcoming home a missionary son on the very day we had scheduled to gather, so we postponed it until last weekend which corresponded with our class reunion on the 19th.

Saturday morning we left about 11:00 and drove to Shelley to participate in "Spud Day" and visit with classmates in a designated area near the Spud Day celebration. I never cease to marvel at what great kids I graduated with and how much goodness I see in their lives. This year there was about 35 of the 86 we graduated with who attended the dinner that evening and it was mentioned that 15 have passed away since graduation. So that comes out to be nearly 50% attendance. There are a few that I see occasionally who live in this area but for the most

part, all have moved away and our paths seldom cross except at these five-year reunions.

After dinner was served, we went around the room and gave everyone a chance to take a few minutes to give an update on their lives. I think it would be safe to say of those attending that 30 are totally active in the Church, several others were reported to be on missions, one couple was preparing for a mission and had their call (South Africa) and others were just completing getting their families raised. Four of us had 10 children apiece, several were combining families (one had 15 children between them), one still had a child in high school, all had grandchildren, (one had 41!) and three had published books. One of our nonmember classmates had fostered over 300 children in the last 30 years! Many had graduate degrees, several served in Vietnam, and many were enjoying marriages of 40+ years!

Of special interest was the story of Kendall Christensen who recently nearly lost his wife. Through a series of miraculous events including angelic visitations, she was spared and Kendall partnered with Brenton Yorgason to tell the story in a book called, "Rory, my Miracle, my Angel." Kendall brought each of us a book and I have been reading it. It is so fascinating and certainly faith-promoting.

When I first arrived at the reunion, Kendall came right up to me and apologized for not knowing that Daddy had passed away. He and Rory live in the Rose Area just north of Blackfoot and so we have had an association over the years although we've never been close. He said that one of the messages he received during his wife's illness was from an angelic visitor who said to him, "Remember, Kendall, that death is as wonderful a miracle as is life!" He wanted to share that with me and I confirmed to him that we had felt the Spirit very close during the time of Daddy's illness and passing.

When telling us about how the book came to be partnered with Brenton Yorgason, Kendall reminded us all about his lack of scholarship in high school and of his many escapades. We had a good laugh reliving some of the crazy things he talked about. The thing that I kept thinking about was how in high school Kendall had been a rebel and yet here he was, totally converted to living the gospel and doing all he could to raise a righteous family. It was a good reminder to me that we should never discount the potential and basic goodness of those around us. We can't see into their hearts but the Lord can and will work His miracles to bring them into the fold. On the way home from the reunion Carol, Annette and I rode together and we all agreed that the evening had been a sweet one. We all felt that each person there felt valued and appreciated. Several mentioned as they gave their personal updates that they look back at those experiences during those formative years and give thanks for good friends who made it easy to make good choices.

The amazing thing to me each time I get with my classmates is to realize how much our early experiences (for good or ill) leave an imprint on our lives. It certainly reinforces the importance of making our interactions positive. Who knows what far-reading effects each of us have!

I am leaving tomorrow to go to Logan to help Randy with the children. He is loading a moving van with some of their storage items and will leave Tuesday for Iowa City. Shauntel flew to Omaha yesterday, drove to Iowa City and is house hunting today. Their Smithfield home sale fell through but they have listed it with a realtor and are going to leave it vacant if needs be so that they can join Randy in Iowa in October and get the kids settled in school.

I don't want to mention the BYU game. What a heart-breaker! I always have to shake myself out of the dumps when BYU loses and remind myself that it is only a game! Somehow the world just seems brighter when BYU is winning.

I will be in Lehi on Saturday for Staff's wedding but home later that night. Looking forward to connecting with Mark and Rita, Karen and Jim, and other great Larsens! Hope to see the Cache Valley families briefly while at Shauntel's and have a visit with Don and Deniece enroute to Lehi on Saturday. Next Thursday SaraKay and I are going to fly to Phoenix to visit the Seely's for a few days and then I think I can settle in and get started on my next family history book.

September 30, 2009

The last two days have been busy ones, preparing to leave on Thursday for AZ. SaraKay will be going with me so that will be fun for us both. We leave on the airport shuttle Thursday morning, catch our flight from SLC at 2:30 and will arrive at 3:00 that afternoon in Phoenix. We are so excited!

I had a full week with spending time with some of the Cache Valley bunch as well as the extended Larsen family. I left here Tuesday morning, arriving in Smithfield about 11:00. Randy's

mother, Marilyn, had arrived Sunday afternoon and been helping Randy get the rental truck loaded for his departure. On Monday night members of the Elder's quorum helped load a lot of the heavy furniture and Randy had been finishing up getting his office packed and ready to go.

Shauntel was in Iowa City looking for housing and my plan was to help from noon on Tuesday until Thursday morning. When I arrived Marilyn said that she would keep helping Randy and so I took care of Kinzie and Drake and did what I could to expedite things. Randy needed to be in Iowa by 9:30 Thursday morning so he was on a deadline and between him and Marilyn they finished packing the rental truck and hooked up the trailer that the car was being towed on. It made for a huge day but by 9:00 that evening, Randy was on his way.

I was so grateful for Marilyn and all her help. I don't know if Randy could have done it without her. On Wednesday morning she left for home and I stayed to babysit and keep the home fires burning until Shauntel's arrival later that night. It was interesting to see how much more manageable life is right now for Shauntel with Drake and Kinzie getting older and Archie in school a full day. The weather was nice and we enjoyed some time outside playing as well as watching some of the PBS shows on TV.

That evening Stephani arrived to visit for a while and Bonnie and her five brought pizza for supper. It was such a nice break to have supper provided and all the kids occupied with their cousins. After enjoying the pizza, the kids played outside and we got in some visiting before Bonnie left about 7:30. It had been so fun that Drake and Archie really had a tough time when the party was over and it was time for bed. I was grateful that I could promise them that when they awoke the next morning Shauntel would be there to greet them. I could tell that they were more than ready to have their own mother back home.

About 10:30 the airport shuttle dropped Shaunie off and we had a short visit before we retired for the night. Shauntel said that it felt like going home to be back in Iowa City after the absence these past five years. It was a sweet coincidence that one of Randy's best friends, Shane Squires, was also in Iowa City, working on a fellowship and he and his wife generously offered their home to Randy until he could get settled into his own.

I left Thursday morning for home and made the trip without incident. I arrived home to find all well here. Originally SaraKay had been going to spend the nights with her friend, Amy Gwynn, but decided to try it here alone and she got along fine. I appreciate her willingness to accommodate to the needs of the family. It's such a blessing for me to be able to be free to come and go when I'm needed.

Early last week I contacted both Gary and Rick about the possibility of riding with them to Staff's wedding on Saturday. Gary and Linda were going to be visiting several of their children enroute and Rick was having a hard time find a substitute for his job so I decided to drive myself to Layton, spend some time with Deniece and Don, and then ride from there to Lehi with Karen and Jim. Karen and Josh were flying out Sunday morning to D.C. to do some touring and spend time with Teresa who is doing some sort of internship there. They were not going to stay too late in Lehi so I figured that I could get back to Layton and drive on home before it got too late Saturday night.

Well, partway through the week Linda called and said that they would be glad to have me tag along and that they could drop me off at Deniece and Don's and then I could ride with Karen and meet up at the wedding and then they could drive me on home. I was overjoyed to not have to make that trip alone and gladly accepted their offer. It worked just perfectly! They picked me up at 7:00 Saturday morning and we visited nonstop until they dropped me off in Layton at Deniece's. It was wonderful to get to visit and catch up on the news of our families.

When I got to Deniece's I visited with her and Don for nearly three hours and then Deniece served us a delicious lunch. At one o'clock Karen picked me up and we went to a soccer game to watch Josh play and then rushed back to her home to get changed and ready for the wedding. When we pulled into the yard, Jeanie, Scott, and Bethany were there and we had a little time with them before leaving for Lehi.

It was such a thrill to be with most of Daddy's siblings and several of the cousins at the wedding. It was truly a gala affair. Kaye's yard had been decorated with a large tent, tables and chairs, beautiful red roses highlighting the decor. The yard was meticulously groomed and the guests filled the tent to overflowing. It was special to see both Kaye's and Staff's families and their spouses and grandchildren and get

acquainted with Kaye's family and reacquainted with Staff's kids. What a treat to be together in such a lovely setting, on a perfectly warm and pleasant fall evening, and to renew our associations with the extended Larsen family. Those present were Gary, Linda, Garon, Alison and their four children, Ashley and Jeff, Jennifer, Coco, Matt, Chris, Jim and their families, Jeanie, Scott, Maren and Brock, Bethany, Mark, Rita, and Jessica, and Karen and Jim. Following the wedding a delicious buffet was served and visiting and dancing rounded out the event.

Staff and Kaye both looked so happy. Kaye was dressed in a beautiful full-length gold gown and Staff looked spiffy in a dark, pin-striped suit. It certainly was a magical time!

Enroute home with Gary and Linda we stopped at Garon and Allison's (they are only a couple of blocks from Staff and Kaye) and also visited Emily in Salt Lake. It was such a fun day for me and a special thanks to everyone who took their time and resources to get me there and back.

SaraKay just called from Kesler's and said that she needs to stay until closing since one of the checkers got sick and can't work her closing shift. That is going to make things a little more harried in the morning since she was going to do all of her packing tonight and now won't be able to. Oh well, we'll manage.

October 10, 2009

Well, we're home and back into our routine. We had a wonderful time in sunny Arizona thanks to Chet and Becky's efforts to show us a good time. We had really wanted to see each of the kids in their activities and before our trip was over, we had watched Larsen and Cole in a soccer match, attended a swim meet for Maddie and gone to a tennis lesson with Tate. It sure keeps Becky on the run to keep everyone on task and where they need to be.

After we got the kids off to school Becky treated us to a lunch at a great sandwich shop and we visited leisurely for nearly two hours! What a luxury considering how harried life gets.

Saturday at the swim meet Lisa met us and we had a chance to get in some visiting with her. Whenever I'm with her I sense how much she misses Mom and Dad. She is just at that stage in her life where she really needs Mom's listening ear and good advice. My heart aches for her with the challenges she is facing. She mentioned that Riley now has a modern device that aids her in communicating her needs. It is a keyboard with pictures on it and Riley has learned to press the correct key. Lisa said that it will be a huge boon to all of them to have Riley better able to communicate.

It was very interesting to watch the swim meet. It is something I haven't had much exposure to and it was fun to watch the competitions and the coaches and their techniques with the team members. This was Maddie's first meet so she was just learning the routines and I had to admire her for her tenacity (and the fact that although her grandma Susan and great grandma Ilene would drop like a lead weight any time they were in the water, she has overcome that genetic handicap and is quite the swimmer!)

Following the meet we drove to a resort town, Payson, and spent the rest of Saturday, all of Sunday, and part of Monday at a spacious cabin, courtesy of Chet's bosses at Isagenix. It was in an exclusive area and the golf course was right out the patio doors. The surroundings were just beautiful and in the distance we could see mountains with large outcroppings of red rock showing through the forest. It was so quiet and peaceful and gave us a wonderful spot to relax, enjoy conference, and get away from the 90+ heat in the valley.

The cabin was completely furnished with a modern kitchen, big screen TVs in every room, large bathrooms for each bedroom, and ceiling to floor windows across the entire back of the cabin (as well as a large garage with a marble floor!) There was a pool table and shuffle board in the game room and the owners had even stocked the frig and cupboards with treats for our group. We really felt like we were living in style!

On Sunday morning as we all watched general conference, the kids played with "kits" that the YW in their ward had prepared to help them get more out of conference. Part way through the session, the rest song, "How Firm a Foundation" was sung and, of course, us adults started singing along. Unbeknownst to me, that song is one of the Primary songs for this year and all at once all the kids joined in singing with us. It was such a sweet moment and it was a thrill for me as their grandma to hear them singing and to know that they are being taught and nurtured in gospel truth. We live in difficult times and yet if we stay close to the Church and its teachings, we will be able to meet the challenges and find peace.

Monday morning, we took a hike before leaving for home and enjoyed the interesting plants and trees. Maddie had recently attended an outdoor camp and was able to tell us a lot of interesting things about the plants we saw (such as that the bark of a Ponderosa tree smells like vanilla.) The club house pool was available for our use but because of the chill in the air we opt to leave about noon and go swimming in Becky's pool at home when we arrived later that day.

Arizona certainly has its charm this time of year. I can see why so many retirees choose to spend their winters there and why everyone who lives there seems to love it. Becky and Chet have such a lovely home and yard.

We arrived home to Blackfoot Wednesday night about 6:30 after a full day of traveling. All in all, everything went smoothly. It was fun to take SaraKay with me this trip since she had not gone with us last year when Daddy and I made the trip in January. The only problem with taking SaraKay is that she totally preempts the grandma in the family. All the kids just mob her and play with her non-stop. She is definitely the favorite aunt at the Seely's!

On Thursday afternoon Mike and Marci arrived and we had a good visit with them. Olivia is just at that age where she is growing so much and it was fun to get to hold her and see how she is changing. Mike and Marci sure have some cute little girls! Mike had worked things out so that they could spend the night, but SaraKay had work at 9:00 and I had to leave at 8:00 a.m. for the temple Friday morning, so we missed the chance to enjoy them before they had to leave for home.

In closing I would like to mention something that happened while I was in Logan and babysitting while Shauntel was house hunting in Iowa a couple of weeks ago. Prior to going I had come across an article in "Mormon Times" about Linds's grandfather, Lowell S. Bennion. A part of the article was a reprint of a poem that Lowell had written. Reading the poem gave me a whole new appreciation for Lowell and Linds and their philosophy of finding joy in nature and in the simple things of life. I was so impressed by the poem that I cut it out and included it in a birthday card I gave to Linds.

Stephani had invited me to pick raspberries while I was there and so I made plans to take Drake and Kinzie with me one morning after Arch and Camille were off to school and to pick berries until the kids got restless. When we arrived, Linds had buckets for us and the kids and I went out into their expansive garden and started to pick berries. Things went relatively well with Drake and Kinzie playing in the dirt, eating some cereal I had taken for them and eventually playing with a cat that came to keep us company. Soon Linds finished up a conference call he was on and came out to join us. I hadn't requested his help but it was such a sweet gesture and certainly appreciated. Before we left later that morning Linds loaded us up with cucumbers, tomatoes, summer and winter squash, and other bounty from his garden. It was not only generous but an inspiration to see what the Bennions have coaxed from their garden spot and I couldn't help thinking that Lowell was probably looking down from heaven and smiling that the legacy of "simple things" is being perpetuated by his oldest grandson. Thanks, Steph and Lindsay for all the wonderful produce, raspberries, and your thoughtfulness.

October 12, 2009

I know that I just wrote on Friday but I want to get back on my schedule so this will be short. I mentioned that I had my first day at the temple on Friday. Brenda Godfrey is my shift supervisor (Friday from 10-4:30) and she had to be there at 8:45am, so I rode with her and spent my first hour getting my nametag and studying. The temple ceremony and the memorized parts can only be studied while at the temple in the library so I was grateful for some quiet time to get started with it.

At 10:00 we had a devotional and then we were given assignments. I guess that once I am trained, I will be given a schedule that I will have for two months but for now I was taken around and shown the different locations and assignments. I had several half-hour blocks throughout the day that I returned to the library to study and then a time when I practiced with my trainer. I had a half hour lunch hour that I shared with other workers and I was at the veil twice. The first time I had a trainer with me but the second time I was able to fly solo. It was a little intimidating but everyone has said that it just takes time until the words come easily and it's not so stressful.

I had been worried about missing Daddy each time I did my temple assignment but it is different than I thought it would be. Most of the time the workers have assignments totally different from their spouses and many of the sisters who are there with their husbands told me that they

seldom cross paths so I'm not feeling quite so alone.

It truly is a bit of heaven to walk the halls of the Lord's house in my new white dress and feel the Spirit so strongly. The words of the temple ceremony are being burned into my memory and with that comes a frequent and strong confirmation from the Spirit that what takes place within that holy house is of God and is given to bless us and our posterity as well as those who have gone before. I am so grateful to have this new assignment and although it is going to cramp my weekend style a little, I know that I need to make the sacrifices to fulfill this assignment each week.

I have been sobered lately by some of the issues our immediate family is grappling with and have continued to petition the Lord for his watch care over each of you and your situations. This morning as I got out of bed the scripture from the Book of Exodus "stand still and see the salvation of the Lord" came into my mind. As you might imagine this scripture isn't one on my frequently read list but somehow was in my mind today and I am going to assume that it was the Spirit bringing me comfort and assuring me that the Lord is aware of our trials and will show forth his power when the time is right. I love each of you and am so grateful for the gospel. It is my anchor in the storms that rage and my strength in facing each day.

October 19, 2009

When I left for my walk this morning it was raining and dark and I remembered again that I need to finish winterizing before the snows start to fall. We have such varied weather this time of year that it's deceptive. It can be shirt sleeve weather one day and really cold the next. But the heating bill tells the tale. The last few months my bill has been less than $15 a month and the one I received last week was for $50.

Although I notified Dad's siblings, I need to let everyone know that Rick slipped while coming down a ladder and landed on his knees on the cement landing, falling about 10 feet. Although he was very fortunate to not have broken any bones, the tendons and ligaments in his knee and hip on one side were terribly torn and he will be on crutches for the next six to eight weeks. I was so sorry to hear about this. I'm sure life has become much more complicated. Remember him in your prayers.

Our trip to Logan on Saturday was rewarding. SaraKay had arranged to get the day off so she came with me. The night before I had helped at the reception for Karina Jenks and put in a full day at the temple and so although Bonnie had offered to have us come Friday and spend a little more time with them, the situation wasn't such that we could.

When SaraKay and I drove from Tremonton to Wellsville we were absolutely amazed at how beautiful the mountains were with all the fall colors on the hills. I told SaraKay that if I get to live anywhere in heaven, I will choose to live in the mountains. Cache Valley sure has its charms this time of year!

We arrived a little early and went directly to the Tabernacle where Nate's court of honor was held. It was open and we wandered around a little bit and admired the building. It was built in the late 1800's and the town has invested a lot in it to keep it usable and maintained. Nate's Eagle project was to totally redo the cry room that is attached to the main chapel. Steve had taken extensive pictures of the room prior to the project and a woman who oversees the tabernacle had used the pictures and made a small bound book in appreciation. It was really a unique gift for all his efforts. On a bulletin board in the entry way of the building there was a list of other Eagle projects that had been completed or were in process.

In the cultural hall downstairs Nate had set up a table with memorabilia from his scouting experiences. It was touching to see several of Dad's things that were a part of the display. When Steve and Bonnie arrived, they brought some pictures taken at last summer's scout camp. Nate and his troop walked away with a lot of honors and Nate himself had taken first place in two events. It was pretty impressive.

While everyone else was getting things ready for the meeting I watched Steve work with the boys. One young man who is their patrol leader was conducting the court of honor and Steve talked through with him the program and what he should say and do. I was impressed with Steve's patience and leadership as I watched him interact, and later I sat in the chapel while he instructed the members of the troop in their responsibilities. It was obvious that he was liked and respected and that he knew he was in the business of building boys.

It was so touching to be in that familiar scouting environment that I was already emotional before the meeting began. Each speaker complimented Nate and his efforts not only to earn merit badges but his role in supporting all of the members of the troop in their efforts in their own scouting trail to their Eagle.

Both Steve and Bonnie spoke and it was touching as they recounted situations in Nate's life and his goodness and energy in giving service. Other leaders who had been associated with Nate really praised him. One leader said that in all his years in scouting he had never had anyone earn as many merit badges as Nate had (44). That's quite an accomplishment.

After receiving his award, Nate spoke and had each of his leaders, parents, family, and grandparents stand as he expressed appreciation for them. He presented me with a pin that signified my part in his achieving his Eagle rank. It was totally unexpected and caught me off guard. I had been trying to keep my emotions in check during the whole ceremony and so to walk to the front with a red nose and eyes to receive the award was a little unnerving. I felt that the award was "in behalf of Dad" although Nate didn't say it that way. I know that Dad's influence on these grandsons has been tremendous especially in regards to scouting. Anyway, whether meant for me or Dad it was a sweet gesture and very much appreciated.

I was especially proud to see Linds, Sam, Nate and Steve all seated in the Eagle's nest. Josh just completed his project last week and is awaiting his board of review or he would have been up there with them, too. I so appreciated having Stephani and Linds and family and Shauntel and her four take time to attend. I know how busy life can get. Bonnie's parents, Shannon, Joel, and Julie and some of their families were also able to be there to show support. I hope Steve will post some of the pictures that were taken since several in the family have asked about it.

Following the clean-up some of us went to Steve and Bonnie's to watch the BYU/San Diego game and enjoy pizza before we headed home. Steve and Bonnie have made several improvements to their home including painting the bedrooms and an accent wall in the kitchen area. It really looked great and I loved the colors they chose and the way it all tied together. We left about 6:30, dropping by Shauntel's for a few minutes before leaving for home. It made for a very special day for us!

Several of you have asked about how Randy is doing. He has good days and bad but I think he is encouraged that this situation may be one that will work for him. He knows several coworkers from his time as a resident there and it has been nice to reconnect with them. Shauntel continues to get things packed up and ready to go. If all goes as planned, they will leave the first week in November.

Shauntel's Primary program was yesterday and she said that it went off without a hitch. Camille had a talk to give about her experiences in the temple and she had written it herself. Her opening statement was, "My experiences in the temple have been times of happiness," and then talked about when they took Archie to the Nauvoo Temple, Drake to the Logan and Kinzie in Salt Lake. She expressed that she was grateful that they were sealed and could be together forever. I asked Shauntel if it had been difficult to keep her emotions under control and she said that she was so involved trying to remember when to have the Primary children stand and sit and sing that she didn't have much time for the emotions to surface, but I'm sure it was sweet. I wish I would have planned better and been able to be a part of it. This time of year, I truly regret not living close enough to attend each of my grandchildren's Primary programs. Our ward program is one of my favorite sacrament meetings.

This weekend is our ward dinner party and next week our temple shift has our shift on Friday as well as one Saturday from noon to 8:00 p.m. It will make for a full week. I received word that the Pakistan Journals have been shipped so I am anxious to get those here and then get them distributed to my siblings so that they are ready for Christmas. Time marches on and October is passing quickly. SaraKay is counting down the days until she starts on January fifth.

October 26, 2009

Another week has passed and the ward dinner party is over. It was a smashing success. We had lots of fun learning "interesting but little-known" facts about each other. Since I had done all the phoning, I was the MC and could give the "rest of the story" to some of the one-liners I collected from people. It became especially fun when I phoned the kids of some of the ward members and collected incidents from them Such was the case when I called Robert Acevedo and his

response was, "I was raised in a foreign country." I thought to myself, "That is known by everyone!" So I called his son, Danny, who lives in Blackfoot and he called his sister, Anne, who lives in California and they gave me this one-liner to use: "I was such a good soccer player that I once considered going pro, but my life took a different direction." What a fun fact! And you should have seen Bishop Acevedo's face when I read it! Carol Adams gave me the following statement about her husband, Bishop Adams: "I was voted 'Best Looking' by my high school classmates my senior year." Bishop wouldn't stand up when I asked the person to stand that fit this statement and Carol got to laughing so hard she could hardly contain herself. She told me she was going to be in the dog house for giving me that bit of trivia but it was fun to see the bishop's response. Sunday morning some of the ward members were still chuckling about it. Janet Jenks's one-liner was, "I once carried a human leg from surgery to the hospital lab." You can see how fun it was to learn these things about each other. Anyway, the party was great and we felt rewarded for our efforts. Now to get the Christmas party going.

I heard a sad story last Wednesday night when I went to "Messiah" practice. I had called Brenda Cox a couple of weeks ago about reserving the gym for our ward party. Later when I called to confirm, her husband said that she was still in Camas with her daughter, Melinda. I assumed it was for a new baby or something and didn't press for details. When I sat down by her at the rehearsal I queried if she had gotten the new mother settled or whatever she had gone for. She said that she and Kim had decided to go to Las Vegas to support their son-in-law in a relay race in the area. It was a long enough race that it lasted for 24 hours so a lot of the runners were running in the wee hours of the night. Her son-in-law's part of the race was over at 3:00 a.m. and he was finished and getting some bottled water as he was visiting with other participants at the trade-off point when a drunk driver came along and hit and killed him instantly. No one else was even injured but he left Brenda's daughter, Melinda, a 31-year-old widow with three small children, the youngest with special needs. What a difficult situation! I had read about the runner in the newspaper and assumed that he had died of a heart attack or something since the cause of death wasn't mentioned. What a shock to find out that his wife is from right here in our area! Brenda stayed there with Melinda for a couple of weeks before coming home and she said that her son-in-law's family lives in southern Utah so Melinda was going to stay in her home in Camas for a while until she had figured out what to do. What a tough situation for everyone concerned.

I guess the good news of the week is that those who have had the flu are getting better and the rest of us are trying to stay well. Becky mentioned that Cole was feeling a little sickly but so far, the rest of them have been alright. At the temple Friday someone said that the medical profession thinks a similar virus made the rounds in the 60's and early 70's and that a lot of us older people may have had it then and so have a natural immunity to it now. (I guess surviving the 60's was a challenge in more ways than one!) Anyway, SaraKay and I both got a regular flu shot but the swine flu vaccination hasn't been available here and it is controversial enough that I'm not sure we are going to try to get it when it does become available.

November 2, 2009

Well, the ghosts and goblins are put away for another year and from all I could gather from blogs, letters, phone calls and the like, Halloween was a real hit this year. Our Moreland area had a trunk-or-treat at the Moreland Church building and SaraKay dressed up for her day at Kesler's but I had double duty at the temple on Friday and Saturday so I missed it all. (As most of you are aware, this did not break my heart since Halloween's my least favorite holiday!) Anyway, it sounded like we had a lot of interesting little goblins in the family.

Mike and Marci dropped by enroute to Island Park on Thursday but were going to be back home on Saturday evening to attend a Halloween event that Marci was helping with. Their family was dressing up as the Big Bad Wolf and the Three Little Pigs. What was Marci? She was going dressed up as a house (the brick one that didn't get destroyed, mind you!) Mike brought his costume for us to see, complete with huge wolf teeth that had been custom made by his partner in the dental practice. (Sounds like a lot of fun and games going on at the office!) He had a wig that was truly frightening and hairy hand things with long claws that looked like they could rip open almost anything with one fierce swipe!

On a different note, let me tell you about my day in the temple on Saturday. At our chapel devotional before going to our assignments, the temple matron wished us all a Happy Halloween. It brought a ripple of laughter since it just seemed

so strange to think that we were totally removed from the festivities outside. Because I had passed off my memorization, I was given regular assignments and I had a great time doing all sorts of new duties. I worked at the veil twice, got in an hour-long sealing session, greeted guests in the front lobby, counted patrons enroute to the endowment session, spent an hour in initiatory, and assisted in the baptistry. What a sweet day, seeing all the patrons, old and young coming to the temple. When I was in the baptistry the workers there commented on the young people coming in on a regular basis to do baptisms, totally unassigned and many times coming there with a date. While I was there, two separate wards came in to do their assignments and the kids seemed so pleased to be in the temple (even on Halloween).

Today in testimony meeting Brenda Godfrey mentioned that ever since the temple has changed the way it does initiatory and sealings that more patrons are coming and delighting in the opportunity to choose what they want to do instead of coming to fill assignments. I don't know if this change is throughout the Church or a local decision, but the patrons can do a 20-minute sealing session after doing an endowment or they can just choose to do initiatory and sealings instead of an endowment session.

I think that one blessing of being an ordinance worker is that the Lord allows me (in some small way) to see each patron as He does, and as I assist these sisters, I am aware of the love the Lord has for them and of His desire to bless them. I think we all underestimate the Lord's love for us and His willingness to help us find answers to our problems and cares.

I am leaving Tuesday morning for Logan and will be there through Thursday to help the Andersons with their move. Shauntel says that they have stayed healthy and that she has been able to get most things packed up and ready to load. The movers are coming on Wednesday and will load the moving van and then drive it to Iowa while Shauntel, Marilyn and the kids follow on Friday or Saturday. Moving is always an ordeal but hopefully things will come together and they will be able to get this one done with a minimum of problems. Randy seems to feel that this situation is workable and so Shauntel is encouraged and anxious to join him and get their life settled down and kids in school.

The weather has gotten colder and the leaves are all nearly off the trees. I raked a couple of times last week and hope to finish up these next couple of weeks, weather permitting. Idaho Falls and Rexburg had a big snow storm last Friday but we didn't get much. I'm having a man come tomorrow to check my furnace and I have hired a fellow to put up rain gutters for me before winter sets in. I took all of our fire extinguishers for repair and will be picking those up tomorrow. I'm planning to get my propane tanks filled and have that on hand in case of any outages. Summer is a busy time with the yard to attend to, but winter brings its own brand of worries and I'm trying to do all I can to secure myself against the cold.

November 9, 2009

I've had a wonderful Sabbath, complete with an inspiring Primary program in sacrament meeting and a great fireside tonight. I had been dragging my feet about attending any "singles" activity but one of the older sisters who doesn't drive at night needed a ride so I volunteered to go with her. It was a surprise to see that President and Sister Gwynn were the speakers and they really gave great talks. Sister Gwynn spoke on the importance of gratitude in our lives, especially when we are immersed in trials that could tempt us to be downcast and discouraged. She mentioned what they have been going through the last seven months with her husband's unemployment. To survive this trial, they sold their lovely home, are renting a small, older home, she has gone to work, President Gwynn has been working in the harvest, and their daughter commutes two days a week to BYU-I instead of being able to attend full-time. Their daughter, Amy, is SaraKay's best friend so I have been aware of their troubles and have watched with admiration as I have seen them make the adjustments necessary to weather this difficult time.

President Gwynn spoke of being in the depths of despair and of one night reading about Christ walking on the water and Peter's attempts to do the same. In the account Peter makes a beginning but as he looks at the stormy sea and considers his situation, he loses faith and begins to sink. He cries out and the Savior immediately extends his hand and rescues him. He said to Peter, "O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?" President Gwynn said that the "storms" that were raging around him during this period of unemployment were so overwhelming and frightening at times that he could really identify

with Peter. But he bore strong witness that the Savior will reach out to us and strengthen and rescue us if we ask and live worthy of his help. I loved that analogy and felt like both messages were timely.

As most of you are aware, I spent Tuesday-Thursday in Smithfield with Shauntel, helping her get moved. When I arrived, it was reassuring to see that she had nearly gotten everything packed except those things that she and the kids have needed to carry on with life until the move was made. Camille and Archie were continuing with school and Shauntel was trying to keep their family life and schedule as normal as possible to avoid too much upset.

The moving van and the men that were to load the van were coming Wednesday morning and so Tuesday we went room to room and packed up anything else and started cleaning. That afternoon the YW in the ward called and asked if they could come for their activity that night and help out. Since the basement was nearly empty, we decided to have them wash out some cupboards and clean the small kitchen area. It was so sweet of them.

The next day the Relief Society president and bishop's wife arrived and helped wash out the cupboards in the upstairs and Shauntel's neighbor took Kinzie and Drake for the morning. The movers arrived at 9:30 and by five that afternoon they had loaded up almost everything in the house and the garage. The Merrie Miss girls called and brought over supper for us that evening, and Stephani came and started shampooing the carpets. Bonnie took the children for the afternoon and part of the evening and we were able to move quickly through what was left and prepare for them to leave on Thursday.

Thursday morning Randy's mom arrived and she washed baseboards, door jams, and touched up other areas while another neighbor took Kinzie and Drake and kept them until after lunch. By the time I left for home at 1:30 the house was gone through, Shaunie had the minivan loaded for their trip, and all the details of vacating had been arranged.

It was a huge relief to know that all had worked together for Shauntel to leave on schedule. Marilyn offered to make the trip with them to Iowa City and help out on that end. When Shauntel called Saturday morning, she said that they were getting along great. Drake and Kinzie had slept well in the hotel and they were scheduled to arrive in Iowa City Saturday afternoon. What a blessing to have the move behind them.

As I drove home on Thursday afternoon, I kept thinking about how amazing it was that everything had gone so well. I thought about a song that is entitled, "Angels Among Us." I can't remember the words but the message was that we are often surrounded by angels, both seen and unseen, who support and help us in our extremities. I certainly felt that way about my time in Smithfield.

Regarding my temple assignment; since I am now officially trained, I received a two-month schedule of my duties. I will work at several different assignments. It was such a fun day for me to do initiatory, work at the veil, help in the baptistry, and hand out clothing to patrons who come to do initiatory. It is heart-warming to see people come to the temple. I know that they are making many sacrifices to be there and also seeking blessings and it is sweet for me to participate in their experience. I had worried that the "sitting" jobs would be a bore, but nothing is a bore. When I have a few quiet moments, I am able to read the scriptures and that is an extra bonus of those quiet assignments.

I realized that I will have to work my schedule at the temple the Friday following Thanksgiving so that will alter my plans a little for those of you who are coming home for the holiday. I hope it will work for everyone to spend Friday helping out here with some projects and I will have Friday outlined with meals, etc. so those at home will have what they need until I arrive about 5:30 that evening. Hope that is okay with everyone.

(Monday) I got a call from Shauntel this afternoon. They arrived safely and she got the kids enrolled in school this morning. Their truck load of furnishings is still sitting in Ogden so they are hoping that the truck will still arrive on Wednesday as planned.

My birthday is on Thursday and I will be involved that evening in a Relief Society Thanksgiving party so I would be more available on Wednesday night after Messiah practice (8:30) if you want to call or Thursday night after about 8:30. I would love to hear from you but if you get my answering machine, just leave a message. If the girls are over the flu bug, Mike and Marci are going to meet me in Pocatello for a birthday lunch but they've had a pretty sick household so I'm trying to convince them to not come. I know how miserable life is with three little sick preschoolers.

SaraKay and I will be fine here and she said she will take me to lunch if Mike and Marci can't.

November 16, 2009

This past week I have continued to winterize things in preparation for winter setting in. It seems like every time the wind blows, I end up with a yard full of leaves, so Monday I drafted SaraKay and that was a big help at clearing away most of the back yard mess. To give you an idea of the task, this project was my third time raking the back yard! Tuesday dawned sunny and beautiful and I could hear my neighbor, Brent Young, mowing his lawn. He and Shelly had just returned from an extended hunting and fishing trip and he was hard at work in his yard, trying to get things ready for the anticipated snow. It dawned on me that using the mower (with the bag) would work on my front lawn since the leaves weren't as heavy so I went out later that afternoon and mowed the front and side yard and really got things looking nice. I'm glad now that I did because we awoke on Saturday to snow flurries and it has been cold enough that we still have snow on the ground.

I had a great birthday, hearing from all of you children and even some extended family. SaraKay and I went shopping Thursday morning and then met Mike and Marci and girls at Applebee's for lunch. It was such a sweet experience and really made my day special. That evening I attended a ward Thanksgiving Relief Society party and received the well-wishes of the sisters there. Of course, there were several of the younger sisters who teased me about getting old, but it's great to be surrounded by people who accept and love you!

I thought I might include some info about each family since it's been a while since we were together.

Katie is at the Y and thoroughly enjoys her job as well as her ward and classes. Sam attends USU and is living at home to cut expenses and save for his mission. Josh has been involved with debate as well as symphony and has had two debate tournaments so far and brought home a trophy from each. The last trophy he dismantled, hid it in his coat pockets and really surprised his parents when he pulled it out and admitted that he and his partner had placed second of 35 teams.

Shauntel and Randy are in the process of fitting their "houseful of furniture" into a new house and trying to locate all those things that are necessary for regular living but also trying to take the time to sort as the job of settling in progresses. Randy had part of last week off because of Veteran's Day and was able to help with the task. Camille and Archie are in school and both seem to have found a friend or two to help with the transition.

Steve has new employment and the company is in the process of moving to a new building so everything that Steve oversees (computers, phone systems, etc.) needs to be installed and brought up to speed. He said that any one of these systems would be a huge job but to have it all to do has been truly overwhelming. Bonnie is involved with a busy household but seems to have the health she needs to keep the family organized and functioning.

Dave and Andrea, too, oversee a busy household with four in school, two preschoolers and Andrea expecting the middle of January. She and David will be traveling to Provo this week to attend a BYU game with Andrea's mother, Laurel, and then they will be coming here the week of Thanksgiving to celebrate with us.

Becky and Chet continue to enjoy Arizona. Today Becky said that the weather there is so perfect that she feels like she is in some alternate universe. Her Primary program last week was everything she had hoped it would be and this past week she launched her new MozartSmart website, so that is a huge relief after the many months of working to see it come to fruition.

John and Laurel continue to be involved with their family in a variety of activities. Emma and James are both enjoying being in a gifted and talented program at school. John enjoys his bishopric work. He said that there are many in their area who are going through extremely difficult situations and it has really opened his eyes to how blessed they are to have good employment and a strong marriage.

Mike and Marci are busy young parents with three under three, trying to keep up with the life of a bishop and yet carve out some time for the two of them. When they met SaraKay and me at Applebee's and I opened the side van door to help get the girls out of their car seats, I just couldn't help but marvel at what beautiful little girls they have. I know it keeps them hopping but they take it in stride.

Paul and Jenny, too, are shepherding a bunch of rambunctious little ones. Paul volunteers at Beth and Ben's school a couple of hours every other

Friday and said that it has been a fun experience to share that time with them. Paul and Jenny have a wonderful network of friends in their ward that truly have become like family and I know they contribute heavily to those valued friendships.

Tim's new job has been very demanding lately. The company had a new software system installed that malfunctioned and all the departments have been dealing with the fall-out of these problems now for several weeks. It has really added to Tim's workload and he is spending 10-hour days trying to keep up with everything. He will be coming home for Thanksgiving but may only be able to stay for a day due to the high volume of business they do at this time of year.

SaraKay had her big date to the Jazz game but hasn't felt like he has shown much interest since, so she is sorry about that. She had a date last night with another fellow from the branch, but for now she feels like her love life isn't very exciting. Fortunately, she has several friends who share her condition so they commiserate.

We had stake conference today and it was so inspiring. We have wonderful leaders and all the messages really hit home. SaraKay went with me to the Saturday night session and then again this morning. I feel an emptiness attending conference without Daddy. It is one of the most difficult times for me; so many sweet memories. I have felt melancholy all day because of it so I need to get to bed and get up and start fresh tomorrow.

November 22, 2009

We had a major snowfall today; soft, huge flakes that quietly blanketed everything in sight. It was so beautiful that SaraKay and I couldn't quit looking out the dining room windows and marveling at how magical it was. It always seems that that kind of a snowfall seems to slow life down and insulate against the sounds and activities that normally are a part of life. Of course, that magic didn't last long as we had to come to grips with traveling on the icy roads and clearing off our little piece of the earth so that the snow on our front walk and steps didn't get walked on.

Daddy was so good at keeping the walks cleaned off that we didn't even think of it until it was dark and then it dawned on us that we needed to get to work. Before SaraKay finished the task our home teacher arrived and we finished up what SaraKay hadn't done. Part of that time I was in the house with a young man who was working on his "Family Living" merit badge and had come for help so I didn't contribute much to the task.

My week was a fun one. I left Wednesday for Logan, arriving in time to attend Chrissy's strings concert. I was amazed at the number of students who participated in the program. There were three separate groups and easily over 100 students, playing all kinds of stringed instruments including some songs that featured the piano and drums. I surely admire the teacher who accomplishes that amazing feat and keeps her sanity. Many of the songs performed were Christmas ones so it was especially sweet. Chrissy plays the cello and seems to enjoy it and has good friends that share that common interest.

Later we enjoyed a bowl of ice cream while visiting with the kids until bedtime. On Thursday morning Bonnie and I got in some good visiting before I left for Logan to spend some time with Stephani. Steve and Bonnie left for Pocatello where Bonnie had a consultation with a specialist regarding the pain she is having with her back. When she returned Thursday afternoon, she said that she was impressed with this new doctor and he had some ideas for her that sounded hopeful.

I got to attend one of Stephani's classes at the charter school where she teaches. She had wanted me to sit in on her eighth-grade class but it didn't work out so I was there for one of her more difficult groups. I was totally impressed with her class management and her relationship with the kids. She had 30+ students and she moved effectively and efficiently through the lesson material using a wide variety of teaching techniques as well as one-on-one contact. I was amazed at how well the students responded and at the number that came into her room during the lunch hour to get help, finish up the term assignments, and just hang out. She treated each student with respect and yet never permitted anyone to commandeer the class with misbehavior. I'm sure proud of her and know that she is really loved and appreciated by her students. Since she only teaches half days, she took me to lunch and we had some time to visit.

Today was a big day for their family. Sam was getting his patriarchal blessing and Stephani was speaking in their stake priesthood meeting. She was pretty stressed about all the demands on her this time of the year but she enjoys what she is doing and she is nearly through with the college

classes to complete her upgrade for her teaching certificate.

At about 2:30 I returned to Steve and Bonnie's and had a while with each of the kids. They showed me all the things they are involved with and I even got to sit and help Chrissy with her piano practicing. It is so satisfying to spend time with the kids and sense their goodness and to know that they are being nurtured in the gospel.

That night I attended Rachel's play, “Bye Bye, Birdie.” She was one of the main "fans" and had a lot of time in the spotlight. I had gone early and saved seats for Bonnie's Activity Day girls (20) and the other leaders who attended as well as Nate and Steve. It was really a treat! Because I was driving home alone and in the dark, I decided to leave at intermission and let Rachel know what I was doing, but it worked out well since most of her stage time was in the first part of the play. Thank goodness the weather was clear and I made the trip home without incident. I have really come to value my car and my cell phone when I make those trips! Driving long distances alone still fills me with dread, especially when the weather could be bad, but everything worked out well.

I spent part of the weekend getting things ready for Thanksgiving. I'm excited to have some of you kids coming and just hope that the weather will cooperate. With the coming of the holidays, I can feel SaraKay and I getting a little melancholy, but that is to be expected. Most widows tell me that it doesn't get easier, maybe even harder, but that you get used to it. I'm trying to stay positive and keep counting blessings. They are many; including each of you and the love you share with me.

November 30, 2009

The dust has settled and order has been restored! Well, at least relative order... what a fun holiday! Steph and Linds and bunch arrived about noon on Wednesday and Linds, Sam, and Josh went to work getting my Christmas lights hung and doing the other odd jobs I had on a list. David and Andrea came in that evening and Tim arrived later that night. Stephani and Katie helped in the kitchen with the pie making and by nightfall everything was in readiness for the next day. That night the kids played a Wii game that included a guitar, drums, and a sing along. It was pretty entertaining and fun to hear the kids all singing along as the participants played the game.

Thursday morning, we played volleyball and basketball and had dinner about 1:00. SaraKay had to work at 2:00 so we wanted to eat early enough that she could join with us. That afternoon we relaxed and David and Linds helped me with some computer questions. Linds also took quite a bit of time to get my snowblower going for me so that it's ready when I need it.

Thursday night we had a short musical program featuring SaraKay singing, Katie singing a Chinese song which Sam interpreted for us (we found out later that he was just making up the words as he went along!), SaraKay and Anna playing a violin/flute Christmas duet, and Chantelle playing a Christmas song on the piano, (playing with her back on the bench and her hands on the keys up over her head. What a trick! On Friday night Laurel played a concerto for us that she has prepared for a competition next spring.

Friday morning, I left for the temple about nine and Steph and Linds left for home. Tim hunkered down in Dad's office and worked all day on his computer. (His bosses at Scentsy agreed to let him miss Friday at the office if he agreed to work from home.) David and Andrea and their bunch entertained themselves here for the day (SaraKay was at work) and when I arrived home about 5:30 they had dinner on and we awaited Steve and Bonnie's arrival. Soon they joined us enroute home from their visit with Bonnie's family in Idaho Falls and we enjoyed visiting over dinner. About eight they left for home and soon Tim arrived home with his date and we played "Catch Phrase" and "Taboo" until almost midnight.

On Saturday everyone got up and got ready to leave. Dave and Andrea left about 9:30 and Tim wasn't far behind, although he was driving to Provo for the "Holy War" (as the newspaper calls it) against the Utes. He was meeting Mike at the stadium and hoping that Utah didn't tromp us! What a great game and happy outcome for the Cougars!

I was substituting in Gospel Doctrine Sunday morning so I finished off my preparations and relaxed and caught my breath Saturday night! It's always a flurry of activity with a house full of company but it was so nice to be together. I really appreciated having the house full for this first Thanksgiving without Daddy.

Today I am going over details for our ward Christmas party on the 8th and making sure we are ready for that. It's always the biggest ward party of the year and so it's pretty stressful. I have

been taking pictures all year at the different activities and we are having a CD made to be shown that night. I really got some good shots and hopefully will have at least one of every active ward member. It's been quite a project but I know it will be fun to view!

December 6, 2009

This week is going to be a busy one so I'm hoping to get this letter finished up tonight. I've had a busy day but very rewarding. Some of the testimonies were absolutely beautiful in our sacrament and Relief Society meetings and I felt so renewed and rewarded for attending and rubbing shoulders with the good people in our ward. I heard one disheartening thing. (Not in testimony meeting.) Sandra Shelley told me that her son, Cade, who lives in Idaho Falls, went with his family for an extended trip over Thanksgiving and when they returned home, they had been burglarized. Someone had moved out all of their furniture including their appliances, taken all their computers and equipment, even backup discs, taken all the Christmas presents, TV's, bedding, towels, rifled through drawers, even took the disc that had about five years' worth of family pictures on it. As yet the police don't have any clues as to who they were but a neighbor's surveillance camera caught the moving truck and trailer parked in their driveway on camera and confirmed that it happened about 3:00 in the morning. It has been devastating to the family! It's difficult to imagine how they could have gotten entrance in the first place, but they did; it's certainly frightening to think that strangers could gain access to all your private information and possessions. What a tough thing to have happen anytime, but especially difficult during the holidays. The moral of this story is to be sure your homes, cars, garages, etc. are locked up tight and secured.

I rode with Brenda to the fireside this afternoon for all the temple workers and she told me that when they lived in Salt Lake while Lyle was working in the CES office that she returned from a trip to find that their apartment had been ransacked. All the stuff had been dumped out of their closets and drawers, Christmas gifts taken, even the goodies they had received from neighbors were taken. She said she felt so violated and frightened and it took her a long time to feel safe in her home again.

Let me tell you a little bit about the fireside. Jay Jensen of the presidency of the Seventies spoke and he shared some interesting thoughts. He said that the temple is all about "the continuation of the seed." He said that Satan is busy today doing all he can to destroy this purpose and his tools are divorce, adultery, fornication, abortion, same-sex marriages, homosexuality, and population control. He said that these tools are truly effective in depriving people of the rich blessings of eternal families and that the work we do in the temples secures us. He also quoted a scripture about "the lineage of Israel being hidden from the world" and he said that this refers to how the seed of the great patriarchs has come down through the ages, and has, despite wars, plagues, famines, and other disasters, managed to survive and thrive. He said that this was because the seed of Israel has been preserved by the Lord for the important work we are doing right now. I wish I could have gotten the references. It was so interesting and fun to go with Brenda. She is a great friend! (P.S. The temple presidency said that the First Presidency have asked them to analyze their needs and be more efficient in using their resources. As a result of this our temple is going to cut back on sessions and our schedule will be reduced. This was quite a surprise but we'll roll with it.)

Saturday night I performed with the stake choir at the community Christmas concert and Friday night SaraKay and I attended the high school performance of Scrooge. I love the music of Christmas and feel especially grateful to be able to participate in the Messiah again. It is difficult music but fun to sing with a talented group of musicians.

Being a part of the Messiah has brought back a flood of memories of Daddy since the orchestra was such a big part of his life the last few years. I have pictures from last Christmas of him in his tuxedo with SaraKay in her black dress the night SaraKay and Angela Winder played their violin concerto with the orchestra. I've found that although right now it is painful, I need to just keep pushing through and with time it won't be so tender. And it's all right to be tender. This time of year, I'm expecting that we'll all have some poignant moments but that's appropriate. I keep thinking of the family's saying that seemed to crop up each holiday season when Daddy would make a trip to Sam's Club and bring home all kinds of goodies for the holidays that we could never afford at any other time such as mixed nuts, bacon, jerky, and other delicacies. Remember the

saying? "Mom keeps us alive, but Dad keeps us happy!"

When I got home Friday night from the temple SaraKay had put up the tree with all the lights on it. What a job! I had mentioned that I was going to spend Saturday doing our decorating and that I wasn't looking forward to it and she took it upon herself to drag everything out of the storage room and get it set up. What a sweet gesture. She did admit later that if she had known how much work it was, she probably wouldn't have done it but once she got started, she didn't want to leave the job half done and just continued on. So, we are now all decorated and ready for the olidays...well, not quite. I need to get the Christmas ward party over on Tuesday and then I can finish up my preparations. When I went for tithing settlement today the bishop asked me how I would feel about being released. I told him I would welcome one since my committee is struggling. He said that they had a teaching job in mind for me and would get back to me on that.

December 14, 2009

I've decided that I need to write a book about widowhood. I am going to entitle it "A Series of Unfortunate Events." (Wait! isn't that already the title of a book?) Anyway, I have had some "unfortunate events" lately and I'm learning some things that hopefully I won't need to learn twice. I don't know if I mentioned it but a few weeks ago SaraKay backed into the garage door as she was leaving for work. She must have been going 0 to 60 mph and really did a number on it! It was so shattered and bent that we couldn't get it to open and so I called the contractor who has helped with our new windows, siding and roofing and he was kind enough to come right over and get it opened enough that we could get the car out. So began my introduction into the world of deductibles, claims, etc. As it turned out I was able to get some help with the expenses but I had to jump through hoops to get things finished up and my reimbursement check received. The installer finally came and replaced both doors since the damaged door was fiberglass and that kind of a door is no longer even made.

On Thursday night I was baking some potatoes and when I went to remove them from the oven, the heating element was on fire! It looked like a giant sparkler and would blaze even brighter when I opened the oven to see if it was still burning. I quickly closed the oven door and latched it to shut off all the air and suffocate the fire but that didn't work. I then turned everything off but the coil kept burning. I threw some baking soda on the coil to no effect. SaraKay thought that we should get the fire extinguisher and give it a rude blast but I thought we could solve it without doing something that drastic. I called the appliance store and they gave me a repairman's number but I got an answering machine so I left a message. The coil continued to blaze. I thought about turning off the power to it but when I opened the switch box, all the writing for the different switches was totally gone or so badly faded that I couldn't figure out which switch went with which appliance. SaraKay was doing her daily run and I didn't want to interrupt that, so I just kept waiting thinking that it would calm down, but it didn't and so I decided maybe an electrician would have some advice for me. I called Clair Packer and he told me to turn off the breaker and that he was in Arizona or he would come over to see what was going on. When SaraKay finished her run, I had her turn off and on the breakers until we got the right one and immediately the coil went black. It was such a relief. But the bad news is that we have been without a range or oven since Thursday and this time of year, that is pretty inconvenient. Today the repairman is scheduled to come and hopefully we will soon be back in business.

We have had some snowy weather and last Saturday I decided to try out my snowblower since I wanted to keep the driveway clear. I fired it up and was having a great time all bundled up in the beautiful winter wonderland that had been created by the new snowfall. I cleared the front walk, the cement pad in front of the garage doors, and then decided to clear the driveway since I had seen Daddy use the snowblower on the driveway numerous times. I was getting along fine when I came unawares upon some loose gravel and the rocks started flying. Well, there is a shield over the rotor blades so I knew that I was safe but all at once a rock flew into the van. It shattered the back window and left a huge hole! I was just heart sick! All the times Daddy used the blower we never had a problem like this and my first time and I create havoc!

Then last night we were performing at the stake choir festival and when I went to leave, I couldn't get the key to turn in the ignition. I tried and tried and finally went back into the church and got someone to help me. They thought that probably the steering wheel was locked and they were able to get it resolved and the car to start. Thank goodness it wasn't something more serious.

One morning last week it was so cold and SaraKay and I remembered that Daddy had a thermometer mounted on the house by his office window. We went into his office and looked for the thermometer, locating it attached to the outside wall opposite his office window. We both were standing with our noses pressed against the window trying to read the small print on the thermometer and commenting to each other that Daddy sure must have great eye sight to be able to read the tiny print that far away. All at once SaraKay said, "Mom, that isn't a thermometer! It is the sensor. Dad read the temperature on a clock he had on his desk." We both started to laugh at our stupidity! Then we started to hunt for the clock since I haven't moved most of what is in his office but we were unable to locate anything that looked even remotely like a thermometer. Anyway, as we hunted and laughed about our antics SaraKay commented that she imagined Dad was in heaven rolling his eyes and wondering how we were going to survive without him.

Now, lest someone run out and buy a new car, a new stove, or a new thermometer for Christmas, let me assure you that I have things under control here, even though it doesn't sound like it. Thankfully, I have more than enough financial resources to cover all these mishaps and I'm slowly learning about how things work around here and what to do if they don't. I am even getting a whole new circle of friends: Rod Love (auto), Lyle Hansen (windshield repair), Ralph Jensen (small motor repair), Randy (fire extinguisher), Bob (furnace fixer), Randy Turpin (plumber), Bob (appliance repairman), Uncle Gary, and all of the high priest quorum and others who constantly are checking on me and offering assistance. Although SaraKay thinks we should have a hotline to our home teachers, I want to use these crises as opportunities for resourcefulness and ingenuity. We have learned to dismantle the drain in the master bath so the water drains more effectively and we also figured out how to put a closet door back on its runners when it came down. It wasn't easy and it certainly wasn't pretty but between the two of us we figured it out and had it put back together. I suspect that these types of mishaps will be a part of this new stage of life that I am in and so I'm hoping to get things to where I feel less panic and more confident to deal with them. I've gained appreciation for Daddy and the ability he had to be our constant fix-it man. And a new appreciation for the cliché, "It's good to have a man around the house!"

I haven't mentioned these things to make anyone feel sorry for me. Sometimes when you children share your troubles with me, I want to jump in the car and rush to your defense. But I know and you know that dealing with challenges is what makes us grow and I try to remember that when I see each of you in your struggles. As your mother I try to trust that the Lord will help you find options and make choices to solve your dilemmas. You need to realize that I have my challenges, too, but I'm not hurting and I'm figuring out things and hopefully will come away stronger and more confident.

Let me close on a sweet note. Recently Stephani and Becky had speaking assignments. Steph spoke at a stake priesthood meeting about young men and the priesthood and Becky taught a lesson on the martyrdom of the prophet Joseph. They both forwarded their talks to me and I wanted to share just a paragraph from each:

Steph: *Let me close with one brief story of protection and strength. My mother, while growing up, lived briefly in the Black Hills of South Dakota. They lived on a ranch there and would drive to their one-room schoolhouse each morning in an old jeep. On their way they would pass through a neighbor's barnyard which contained a huge Hereford bull. Grandma would honk and yell but the bull would come and lean up against the gate. My mom, her sister, and grandma were terrified of this bull and so every morning and every afternoon when they would pull up to the gate, her younger brother, Nate, age four, would jump out of the jeep, and take his little switch and face the bull. He would chase the bull away, swing open the creaky gate, and after the jeep passed through, he would slowly swing the gate closed and jump back in the jeep. When I think of how young men should honor young women, I want to say, "Open and close the gate!" Use your switch to chase away bad influences! Stand up to protect your friends from the Hereford bulls of the world, the dangers, both physical and spiritual!"*

Becky: *Last January my father passed away. This week would have been his 66th birthday. It has been an emotional week for me. Although my father was obviously not a prophet, the past year has helped me to understand the principle of "sealing his testimony with his blood." Over the past year I have found myself remembering and pondering certain parts of my father's life. Things he has said, causes that were important to him, ways that he communicated his testimony and*

commitment to the Lord--all of these things carry new weight, new significance now. Sometimes it is through the lens of death that a person's life comes into sharp focus and the seemingly insignificant things--even just the daily routines that weave the fabric of life--take on a new light.

December 21, 2009

This past week has been full of wonderful Christmas events. On Wednesday we had our "Messiah" dress rehearsal for the performance on Thursday night. It has been such a thrill to participate in this production; made even more so by getting to rub shoulders with so many fine people in the community. Mindy Davison, Noel Tew, Melissa Fife, Delis Orr, and Lucas Hammond were some of the soloists that I know a lot of you kids will recognize. Gary and Linda were so proud of Mindy! She did a great job! Gary mentioned to me that it was of special note that three of the soloists had a parent in the orchestra or choir. I'm sure it was sweet for them to see their children carrying on the musical tradition of their families. The performance went well and we had nearly a full house. I think it was a very ambitious venture for our community and I'm sure it didn't rival what was performed in large concert halls across America, but it was still a thrill to participate in it.

Then on Saturday I attended the "Nutcracker" ballet at the Performing Arts Center in Blackfoot. Peggy Hansen had tickets and their family was going to be in Utah so she offered them to me. We had a truly delightful time!

Sunday morning SaraKay and I participated in our ward's Christmas sacrament meeting. I was in the choir and SaraKay had violin parts on two of the songs we sang. It is always fun to be a part of the ward choir and especially during the Christmas season.

Saturday night SaraKay hosted the annual caroling party for all her high school friends and they decorated cookies, went caroling, played games and then watched a movie. She has had some late nights during the week with other festivities and has developed a cold so she is doing all she can to get the rest she needs so she can feel better for the holidays and also so she won't infect Mike and Marci and their little ones who will be arriving on Thursday to spent the weekend. We are looking forward to having them. I'm sure Amber is old enough that she is starting to understand about Christmas.

I think I'm about ready for the big day. It hasn't been as overwhelming this year with so few to shop for. I imagine some of you are in the thick of it right now and the rush is on. I'm so grateful that each of you have good jobs and the resources you need to provide for your families. We have been so abundantly blessed and despite our loss, we all have reason to rejoice and give thanks.

December 28, 2009

I've had a quiet day today. Put a few of the Christmas decorations away, did a little shopping, and took it easy. SaraKay is at work and is counting down the days until she will be moving to Rexburg (4). Yes, she will be moving on New Year's Day since she is helping on the 2nd and 4th with orientation of the new students. She has packed and repacked her belongings and written copious notes on her final shopping list; we plan to spend Thursday picking up the last of her supplies. She is handing over her RS secretarial supplies, assigning out the music for Sunday, finished up her V.T. and has notified the clerk to be sure her records are transferred to her BYU-I ward. Does that sound like she's excited, or what!!!!!

We had a wonderful Christmas! SaraKay had to work on Christmas Eve until closing, so on the 24th I was here alone puttering around getting ready for Mike and Marci to arrive. I got along pretty well until about 3:00 and then it just seemed so lonely without Daddy. I tried to shake off the melancholy but it persisted. Fortunately, Mike and Marci and their three little ones pulled in shortly thereafter and I felt like I had been rescued. I opened the garage door so that they could pull into the garage and it was quite a sight as they backed in. Their minivan was loaded to the ceiling with car seats, babies, Christmas presents, and all the other paraphernalia that is a part of traveling with small children. When I greeted them, it was obvious that there was excitement in the air. Amber and Ellie were all smiles and Mike and Marci were, too. Their arrival brought a huge dose of Christmas spirit and the hustle and bustle of having them here was just what I needed to cure the blues.

SaraKay arranged to be here for our Christmas Eve dinner and then rushed back to work while we got the girls settled for the night. We visited for quite a while and then decided that things were quiet downstairs and maybe we should get going on the "assembling" of gifts. Thank goodness we started early. One gift had probably 100 pieces to

assemble and Mike, Marci, and I were all working for the better part of 2 hours. When SaraKay arrived home at 10:30 we were still working on it but by 11:30 it was complete. What fun to help with playing Santa for Amber and Ellie. Marci had it all figured out just how the scene would play out on Christmas morning and had strategically placed some toys around the house to add to the excitement. We got to bed about midnight.

I was the first one up the next morning and decided to comb my hair and put on some makeup until the rest of the house awoke. Soon a light went on in the living room and I supposed that it was Mike or Marci. What a surprise I had when I went into the living room and there was Amber, wide-eyed and standing in the middle of all the toys. She hadn't bothered to awaken her parents or Ellie. She just came upstairs, turned on the lights, and was playing with her gifts before any of us were on the scene. I guess the surprise was on us!

The rest of the day we took it easy, watched a movie, played with the girls, and just enjoyed being together. By nightfall I had heard from all you kids. It sounded like everyone was having a fun day, relaxing, and enjoying their gifts. Even the Bennions and Tim called from Mexico to wish us a "Merry Christmas" and give an update on their vacation. They said they would be catching their flights home today so hopefully everything went as planned and they are safely back on U.S. soil.

Saturday SaraKay and I babysat while Mike and Marci went to the temple. We had a few harried moments when all three girls seemed to need something all at once, but once we got Olivia down for her nap, things settled down. I kept reminding myself that Marci does this every day all alone until Mike arrives home from work and comes to her rescue! That afternoon Rochelle Gardner came for a visit and showed us her new baby girl, and then Matt Pretl and his sweet family came. It was fun to touch base with these kids from years past and see how well they are doing. That evening we got the girls to bed early and had a chance to sit and visit.

Sunday we attended our meetings together and even got to hear SaraKay speak in the singles branch. It was so fun for me to have family at church with me. Mike hasn't attended this ward since being made bishop and I appreciated him and Marci being here for me. There were a lot of other young families visiting our ward, too, and I know that he got to visit with some old friends and catch up on some of the happenings in their lives.

Before leaving, Mike gave SaraKay a blessing. It was a tender moment for us all and I was so grateful that Marci reminded us of it before they were on their way home. Daddy was always so good to do this for SaraKay and I know it meant a lot to us both to have it done before she embarks on this new school year.

Earlier in the week I watched both BYU and the Utes win their bowl games! I seldom have the freedom to watch any football during the holidays but I'm hoping to catch some later this week, too, and especially catch the Boise/TCU game on the 4th. Hopefully later this week I can get started on writing Daddy's history. That will be my focus for the next few months. Christmas is certainly a wonderful time but it is also good to have it successfully completed and start looking ahead to the new year. I have felt such gratitude for all my many blessings and for each of you and the love you extend to me. May this new year bring each one the righteous desires of your heart. Love to all.























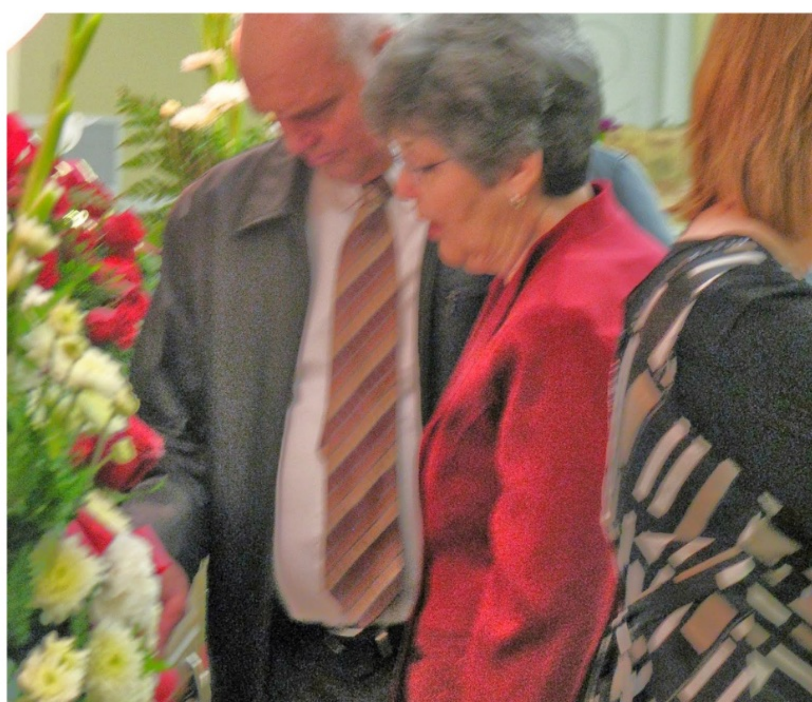
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Snake RIVER








02:02:09
01:18:42PM
PLEASE CALL FOR
ASSISTANCE BEFORE
GETTING UP.
LLAMENOS POR AYUDA
AL LEVANTARSE.






ymnplicity Missionary




















When Earth's Last Picture is Painted
(excerpt)

When Earth's last picture is painted and the
tubes are twisted and dried,
When the oldest colours have faded, and the
youngest critic has died,
We shall rest, and, faith, we shall need it–
lie down for an aeon or two,
Till the Master of All Good Workmen shall put
us to work anew.

And only The Master shall praise us, and only
The Master shall blame;
And no one shall work for money, and no one
shall work for fame,
But each for the joy of the working, and each, in
his separate star,
Shall draw the Thing as he sees It for the God of
Things as They are!

-Rudyard Kipling

Our heartfelt thanks to:
Moreland 6th Ward Relief Society Presidency
JoAnn Tominaga, Tami Parkinson, Stacy Cox
and the Moreland 6th Ward
High Priests Group

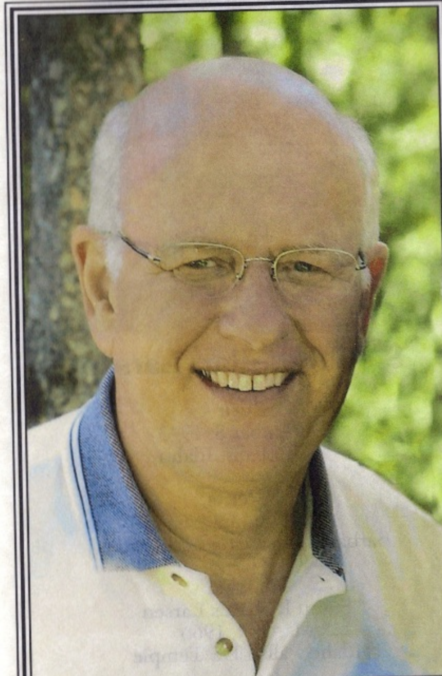


Let thy bowels also be full of charity towards all men, and to the household of faith, and let virtue garnish thy thoughts unceasingly; then shall thy confidence wax strong in the presence of God; and the doctrine of the priesthood shall distil upon thy soul as the dews from heaven.

D&C 121:45

Hawker Funeral Home

In Remembrance



Stephen Allan Larsen



Stephen Allan Larsen

Born
December 8, 1943
Idaho Falls, Idaho

Parents
Allan Franklin Larsen
Barbara Grace Elswood Larsen

Married
Susan Richards Larsen
March 4, 1966
Idaho Falls LDS Temple

Passed Away
January 30, 2009
Blackfoot, Idaho

Casket Bearers

Lindsay R. Bennion	Chet Q. Seely
Randal C. Anderson	John B. Larsen
Stephen R. Larsen	Michael A. Larsen
David A. Larsen	Paul A. Larsen

Timothy J. Larsen

Blackfoot Northwest Stake Center
Bishop Troy M. Goodwin, Conducting
Elder John K. Carmack, Presiding

Family Prayer	David Larsen
Prelude & Postlude	Sue Johnson

"How Firm a Foundation"
Congregational Hymn #85
Rebecca Seely, Chorister

Invocation	John Larsen
Life Sketch	Stephani Bennion Timothy Larsen

"Called to Serve"
Sons, Sons-in-law, Brothers
Shauntel Anderson, Accompanist

Speaker	President Kirk Kirkham

"I Am a Child of God"
Larsen Family

Speaker	President Robert M. Jenks
Remarks	Bishop Troy M. Goodwin
Remarks	Elder John K. Carmack

"Because I Have Been Given Much"
Congregational Hymn # 219

Benediction	Michael Larsen
Interment	Riverside-Thomas Cemetery
Dedication of Grave	Stephen R. Larsen
Flags of Freedom	Aaron Kirkham & Cedar Badge Staff

Our Family

Stephani and Lindsay Bennion
Kate, Sam and Josh

Shauntel and Randal Anderson
Camille, Arch, Drake Yi and Kinzie

Jonie Johnson-Harper
Sydney, Cori and Alex

Stephen and Bonnie Larsen
Rachel, Nathan, Christine, Jared and Anne Marie

David and Andrea Larsen
Laurel, Anna Sue, Joseph, Chantelle, McKay and Nathan

Rebecca and Chet Seely
Madison, Tate, Larsen and Jeong-in Cole

John and Laurel Larsen
Emma, James, Eliza and Tessa

Michael and Marci Larsen
Amber and Ellie

Paul and Jenny Larsen
Beth, Ben, Sophie and Daniel

Timothy Larsen

SaraKay Larsen







HILL HAWKER SANDBERG












HILL HAWKER SANDB














HILL HAWKER








HILL








HILL HAWKER SANDBERG




















Merry Christmas








2010-11























unicef
Fly
Emirates




America



























SMITHFIELD


HOT ROD















BOO!
BOO!






IOWA CITY
ALLIANCE






Zombies are after









CAMARO








Lasso the FUN
2011





BLACKFOOT
Golf Course


PLUS 2 CREW




Elevator












RUMMY

































Old Town
GUIDE
GUIDE 147


Old Town
GUIDE


Pooh
2009-10



















SASQUATCH CONCRETE
CONSTRUCTION INC.




30
Variety Mix
















angel







GAP

Coleman




IDAHO




REDFISH TRAILHEAD
SAWTOOTH NATIONAL RECREATION AREA
SAWTOOTH WILDERNESS
You Will Enter Wilderness in a few miles
WILDERNESS & FIRE
PACK IT


















Gladiator










Boise Valley
Junior Miss




BOISE
BOISE

DARE CAUTION: ENTER IF












BOISE HIGH SCHOOL
20
National Honor Society






The stockings were hung










THIS PLAYGROUND IS
AVAILABLE FOR CHILDREN
12 YEARS OF AGE AND YOUNGER




DIVIDED
1981
ATHLETIC DEPT
Baden


2010
Chandler























POWER RANGERS


EXIT
Outrun Obesity








UP
THIS IS MY




BLUE BELL




17
i9 SPORTS
i9 SPORTS































TESSA



BUILT
FILA






CORAL




Sharks


est. 2006
FLYING
WHEELS




NIKE
DIESEL
FOR SUCCESSFUL LIVING


Love




speedo
















B.O.O.T
CAMP








HAPPY BIRTHDAY
Tessa


Portfolios




Justice
I Scream For Ice Cream!


Dance









Reese's Puffs


Boo


BYU
COUGARS


一路☆平安






YOU CAN
AGREE WITH
ME OR YOU
Sharks








人民共和国万岁
世界人民大团
















ard Rock
CAFE
HANGHAI




20 15 10 5 0 5 10


BYU Cougars














































Carmita
restaurant




BYU
















I Love
my
Mommy

















LET'S DO MORE WITH SATURDAY.
More saving. More doing.
COLLEGE GAMEDAY
BUILT BY
THE HOME DEPOT
SATURDAYS 10AM/ET ESPNHD
collegegameday.com
BRIGHAM YOUNG
COUGARS
BYU


evenflo























FreeLife








BYU
1875
OLD NAVY


BYU
1875
OLD NAVY


1839
1846














102 W. MAIN
OPEN
PIZZA SAM'S
PLEASE
















GoChi






LARSEN
STEPHEN
ALLAN
DEC. 8, 1943
SUSAN
RICHARDS
NOV. 12, 1945


869




THE QUEST
THE QUEST


NIKE AIR


TOM
JERRY



名经典 贺陆亚明学艺三十周







DIVIDED
1981




NIKE


南翔饅頭店










CREW ERIK WEIHENMAYER
SOFTBALL




BOY SCOUTS OF AMERICA ★ 100 YEARS OF






















WEIDER
5





















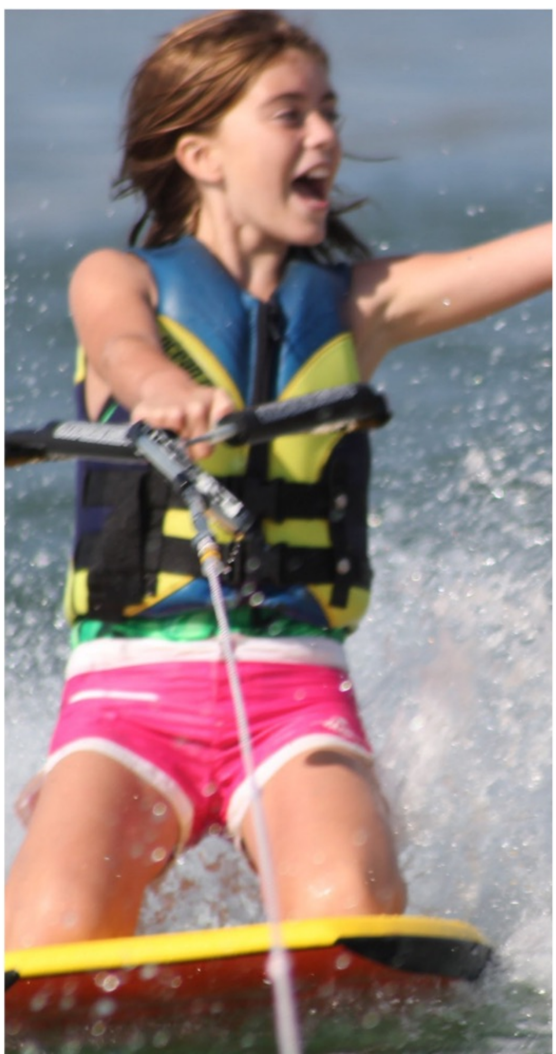






ocean pacific











2010

January 3, 2010

Happy New Year to all! Hopefully you survived your holidays and are ready to jump back into the daily routine. I had an enjoyable New Year's Day. SaraKay was up early helping with inventory at Kesler's and I spent part of the day putting away Christmas decorations and getting the house put back together. Although I'm grateful to have the house back to normal, I miss the Christmas tree. It adds a bit of magic. I will leave the wreath on the front door and the poinsettia by the piano for a while longer so some of that wonderful Christmas spirit will linger a little longer. I caught parts of three football games and thoroughly enjoyed that. I've decided that watching college football is more fun when you don't know the teams. Watching BYU play is sheer agony; too stressful when our alma mater is playing! I take it personally whether they win or lose!

On New Year's Eve a winter storm came through and by morning we had a considerable amount of snow. It continued to snow throughout the day and I wondered if SaraKay should postpone her trip to Rexburg, but she needed to be on campus Saturday morning by 5:30 for instructions about her I-team assignments for the day so we decided to have her go ahead. She promised that she would take it easy and not go faster than was safe. She called me a while later to say that the roads were terrible and that she was still on her way but being very careful. About a half hour later she called to say that she had made it. She said that the main roads in Rexburg hadn't been plowed out and that she was pushing snow with her front bumper it was so deep. She worried that she was going to get stuck before she could get to her apartment but fortunately, she arrived safely.

Yesterday I did some rearranging of rooms and finished up the process of extricating SaraKay and her belongings from the house (except in her bedroom, of course). All day I felt so alone despite the phone calls and visits with you kids. She and I are such good friends and have relished our time together these last five months, although at times it is all we can do to understand each other and our differing views. Fortunately, we can laugh about it and still maintain our closeness. After she left, I shed a tear or two but then reminded myself how fortunate she is to have the money to go, the ability to succeed, and the faith to move ahead. Now for me, another transition! Awk!

I made a beginning on Dad's history and intend to focus on that for the next months. I'm being prayerful and asking the Lord to bless me with the capacity and insight to capture the essence of Daddy's life. I read a statement the other day in a book Becky gave me for Christmas. It was a story about a woman who lost her husband and for two years she just sat around, staring at the wall. Her children brought her in for counseling and through the help of the counselor she was able to renew her zest for living despite the loss. One day she sent a short note to the counselor which signified that her time of healing was over and she was ready to move on. It read: <u>*Grief. I pull up anchor/ and catch the wind.*</u> When I read this, I realized that I'm not there yet. I have this unfinished business of preserving our personal histories and publishing our family history to complete before I am ready to set sail. It presses upon me and gives my days purpose. Hopefully 2010 will enable me to complete these projects and know these memories are safe "in black and white."

Do you remember in the Book of Mormon when Alma was talking to each of his sons and he mentioned that he knew Corianton had been worrying about the next life and the state of the soul after death? Well, as I approach the first anniversary of Daddy's death and all the experiences we had during that time, I have been wondering about just what Daddy is doing and how much he is involved with us here. This morning I awoke about three with a poem going through my head. I couldn't get back to sleep and so I got up and wrote it down. I've entitled it "Message from Dad to Mom."

Do you miss the lunch time "check-in" call?

Do you miss my footfalls in the hall?

Do you miss my return when day is done?

Do you miss the joy of being one?

Do you miss the talks to "clear the air"?

Do you long for someone to be there?

Do you miss the lingering tender kiss?

Do you miss the intimacy and bliss?

Do you long for times of shared delight?

Do you long for arms that hold you tight?

Do you miss the chats when feeling blue?

Do you pray for strength to see this through?

Well, rest assured, dear. I do, too.

In closing let me encourage each of you to jot down some items from your own family's personal experiences of 2009. If you haven't been writing weekly or monthly updates of your comings and goings, take a moment and make yourselves some notes to jog your memory of what happened this past year. Especially record memories of prayers answered, testimonies strengthened and inspiration felt. I love each of you and continue to pray for your happiness and success.

January 17, 2010

SaraKay is now into her third week of school. She left on New Year's Day in a terrific blizzard with her car packed to the limit. She had been preparing for weeks and it was a relief to have her on her way. Her registration proved to be a nightmare. Several weeks before her arrival on campus she received an email from Dr. Brower saying that she may have to change her major because they were revamping that particular part of the music program. She wrote back but never received a reply and so since she couldn't completely register until she knew what they were going to do with her, she spent most of the first week of classes trying to tie down just what to register for. She also had auditions for both Collegiate and Vocal Union and needed the results of those before she could complete her registration. All of this made for a pretty rocky beginning to her semester.

The good news is that she made it into Collegiate Choir, the top choir at the college and she is overjoyed! Although she doesn't have a single person in the choir she knows, she is trying to get acquainted and act like she belongs. She was asked if she would consider accompanying on some numbers and she was grateful for that opportunity.

On Friday the 8th I had my shift at the temple. It was the end of my present schedule since we get a new one every two months and I was sad to see it end. One of my favorite assignments was helping in the baptistry. It was so heart-warming to see the people come to do baptisms. There were two families in particular that were regular attenders. One was a father about 40ish with his 12-year-old daughter. I think that the daughter has a mild learning disability but since I've been there for the last two months, we have gotten acquainted and she gives me a big hug each week when she comes and sits with me while she waits for her dad to finish up. I have been so touched to see this duo come together each week and share that spiritual experience and I know that in the coming years they both will look back on it fondly.

There is a mother/daughter pair that come with family names that the mother has researched and submitted. Sometimes the mother brings a different child but they are there faithfully each Friday to get the baptisms and confirmations done. I have loved being a part of this and seeing the work progress.

On Saturday I left for Boise and arrived in Burley to spend a couple hours with Mike and Marci. Their home was a beehive of activity with Marci bathing the girls and getting them dressed and Mike wielding the vacuum. When I approached the front door, I could hear all the commotion inside so I knew they were up and going but the doorbell couldn't be heard over the vacuum and so it took several rings before someone realized I was at the door. What fun for me when those little girls came running, (Ellie trailing a bath towel) and gave me a big hug. It's certainly good for my self-esteem to be a grandma! We had a wonderful but short visit and delicious lunch before I continued on to Boise.

Just before going Marci asked about the baby and I said that Andrea's mother was coming on the 19th but that I was mainly going to help Laurel with several preparations she was making for Junior Miss. Marci mentioned that she had some formals that she had used once-upon-a-time and offered them. I took them gladly as well as some jewelry from her wedding and continued on.

Saturday night after supper I had Laurel try on the different outfits that she was going to use for Junior Miss and we decided which ones needed alterations and got me lined out for Monday. It was a small miracle that one of the dresses Marci sent was just right for Laurel's talent number! It needed a little altering but Marci told us to do what we needed to for it to fit. By Thursday most of the details were taken care of and I was ready to head home. It was a thrill to be a part of Dave and Andrea's family for a few days and feel like I made a contribution to helping them through the next few weeks of commitments and welcoming a new baby. I babysat while Andrea took care of various appointments, help Laurel with preparing her Junior Miss stuff, and even had time to go with the kids to swimming and dance lessons. I think Andrea is ready to get this baby here!

Let me tell you about my experiences these past two weeks writing Dad's history. Two Sundays ago, I spent a good part of the day in front of the computer just trying to think of all the things Daddy had told me about his growing up years. It was a frustrating experience and by Monday afternoon I felt like it was a lost cause. I decided to put it aside for the time being and do something else. I have wanted to clean out his file cabinet in his office for some time now but just hadn't done it so Monday night I started with the top drawer and sorted things. By the time I got finished with the second drawer, I had a pile of "items of interest" including the letter from President Kimball, other letters from people he associated with through his callings and work, and odds and ends that shed light on his life and activities. Part way through that process it came to me that somewhere there was a missionary box with mementos from his mission and I determined to get it and go through it.

Well, to make this story short, the box contained not only mission stuff but memorabilia from his early days as well. I was thrilled and proceeded to make a time-line with information gleaned from all this new material that I had found. Part way through the week John called and he counseled with me and gave me some sound advice on how to proceed. This seemed to clear my mind and has simplified my task considerably. I feel that I now have the resources to move ahead with confidence.

Mind you, it is still daunting but I have the time and I can put aside other things and crank this out before I get back into yard work. I feel so grateful for this small miracle and that the way has been opened for me to complete this.

Last night I received a phone call from Steve. This past week Bonnie had a temporary device implanted that dispenses pain medication on demand. It seemed to be effective in arresting some of the discomfort she is experiencing and so they are pursuing the course of having a permanent one implanted. The insurance will cover the costs if it proves to reduce the pain by a significant amount and so they are in the process of getting approval and then Bonnie will go into surgery. They are optimistic and hope this will be an answer for her. They have a busy few weeks ahead with Anne Marie's baptism on February 6th and other commitments and could use our prayers in their behalf.

Josh and a partner placed first in a debate tournament @ISU last week out of 30 teams competing. As a result of this the debate coach has invited Josh to take the "We the People" class as a junior when usually it is reserved for seniors. This is the same program that Sam and Kate were a part of. They competed in Washington D.C. their senior years. Congratulations, Josh.

I visited with Shauntel this afternoon and she said that things are going relatively well with Randy's work although things are in a state of transition right now with one radiologist leaving and another coming so it has been a challenge to keep the work done despite all the upset. The kids have adjusted well and Archie is enrolled in both swimming and basketball and burns off some of that energy that he has. One of Camille's school friends is building a home in the same subdivision that they live in so Camille is really excited to know that she'll have a friend close.

Becky is in Michigan for a three-day visit with John and Laurel and today Paul and Jenny joined them for church and then family time this afternoon.

Let me close on a sad note. Today in SaraKay's sacrament meeting their stake president spoke. He told of going last night with a bishop of one of the student wards in his stake to inform one of the students that her mother had been killed in the earthquake in Haiti and that the rescuers have been unable to find her little brother. Her sister died last year in an accident and there has never been a father in the picture so this young women is very much alone. What a difficult situation for her. It really brings the tragedy in Haiti close to home to hear something like that. My heart aches for those people. Kathryn Guthrie in our ward said that her daughter who is a nurse and just returned from an assignment in California is probably going to volunteer to go help with things. It's certainly a sad situation and we need to add that to our prayer roll, too.

January 25, 2010

I guess the big news story of the week is that I've been released as the activity's chairman. What a relief. When I went in for tithing settlement Bishop Adams asked me how I was doing in my calling and I told him that my committee was slowly disintegrating with all the situations impacting on our lives. Marlene Acevedo has gone south until April or May in an attempt to see if the warmer weather would give her some relief with her back problems, another member was

called to serve in the Primary, and LuJean has charge of her 93-year-old mother each weekend in Rigby so she is hardly around. Bishop said that they knew it was time for a change but ask that I give them a little while.

On Monday Barbara Hansen, who was recently called to be a counselor in the Primary presidency, called to see if I would substitute in her Sunbeam class for a few weeks, and I suggested that they turn in my name for her replacement. Within a couple of days Dave called and asked to see me for an interview. So....I am now officially doing what I have unofficially been doing off and on for the last several months. I have a sweet little bunch of kids and I think it is just the right place for me at this time in my life when I am trying to get some of these family history projects done. I know I will miss attending my adult classes but I've always felt that it's healthy to keep a rotation going.

This past week was very productive and busy. I tried to take care of all my business on Monday which left me with some really good time the rest of the week to work on family history. I had been working on Daddy's history and was typing up the monthly Larsen family letters that he had written between '78-88 at which time we started our own weekly family letters. Most of those old letters (including the ones from Grandpa and Grandma Larsen that I have collected) are so faded that there is no way to reproduce them except by retyping them. But, on Wednesday I was getting into some that were darker and cleaner and I decided to try to scan them.

Several of you kids have tried to help me work this high-tech scanner that Daddy bought me but I just have had a mental block about it. Well, I got out all the written notes that you kids had made for me and had prayer and made a beginning. Much to my delight I got it to work! The only problem I am having is that it won't receive more than two at a time. Something happens when I scan more than two and I get a message that the scan is corrupted (that's pretty disturbing in a conservative LDS home like this) so I just stick with two at a time and move ahead. Some days I was at the computer 4-5 hours scanning, editing, saving, and scanning again. When I scan them one or two at a time, they are separate documents so it is going to require that I somehow merge them into the body of Dad's history and that is a whole new thing to learn. I am going to save that project until Steph arrives on Friday. I truly am learning "line upon line." I have felt grateful that the Lord has continued to give me the inspiration I have needed. Maybe he has a whole bunch of "techies" up there helping us "boomers" out with our computer woes!

My prayers continue with Andrea. Tomorrow she will be two weeks overdue which is about when she has had her other babies so hopefully, she can get this baby here without complications. Last Saturday Laurel had her concerto try-outs and called later that day to say she hadn't been selected but that she had played her piece better than she had ever done so she felt like her efforts were rewarded and prayers answered. She has loved taking from Del Parkinson and he is always so good and kind to her. She is certainly an accomplished young woman!

I have had Daddy on my mind so strongly the last few days. Sitting in Primary yesterday and singing those beautiful songs about coming to earth and having a family really touched me and I had a difficult time keeping my emotions in check. I suppose that each of you are having similar thoughts and feelings as we approach the anniversary of his passing. It's funny how little things happen. Last Friday I was taking a nap and I dreamed that I heard Daddy say, "Hello!" It seemed so real that I was instantly awake and almost expected him to be standing in the bedroom doorway with his big smile. His voice sounded so real.

On Saturday night I attended a concert of the "Young Ambassadors" at the Blackfoot Performing Arts Center. Paul and Jenny bought the tickets for me for Christmas and I took Brenda Godfrey with me. She is such a kindred spirit and understands a lot of what I am going through. In turn, she is helping her mother who is dying of leukemia and so I am able to empathize when she talks about the struggle they are having with that situation. I have felt such a need since Daddy died to get out and socialize and be with friends and be a part of things. Brenda said that following Lyle's passing, she found herself pulling into a shell and she knew it wasn't healthy. I can understand why but now that we are both alone, we have each other to go places with and we are doing quite a bit of that. I have several other widow friends who I can chum around with, too, so I haven't felt too awkward about being out and about.

One thing that Brenda experienced that I can relate to is that where ever I go I feel like I am in a fish bowl with everyone all around watching me and hoping that I am okay. I am especially careful

in public to not get too teary because I know people would feel badly. The truth of the matter is that this feeling of loss will probably not get better for a long, long time and yet I am seeing the Lord's tender mercies in my life and want people to know that I am doing fine. It's wonderful to live in a community where I feel people's concern and love and know that I have sweet friends all around. Right at this time in my life, that is such an important part of my healing.

Now in closing I have a request. I would like it if any of you (children, siblings, siblings-in-laws) would like to write me something about your memories of Steve. I am not sure how I will use them but I certainly have felt that you have some memories of him (especially his brothers and sisters) as a child or youth that I don't have in all these memorabilia that I have unearthed. I want to invite Gary and Linda and Rick and Terry for supper sometime this next month and go through the family pictures that Mark put on a CD for us several years ago and just have them reminisce about their memories of their brother. Hopefully I can get a better picture of his early years and include that in his history.

Stephani is going to come spend this weekend with me so I've got someone here to keep me company. I appreciate her thoughtfulness.

February 1, 2010

I'm sure that by now each of you have heard the good news that little Islay (pronounced I-lee) arrived and is doing fine! When I called David last night, I could hear her in the background protesting to the bath that Mom Laurel and Andrea were giving her. She seems to be healthy and strong and certainly is the center of attention in the Larsen household. Andrea has been struggling with the headache issue that has plagued her after each delivery. She has been so faithful to follow guidelines to help alleviate the migraines but there is just something about pregnancy and delivery that upsets her system and she has to be so guarded in all that she does. I'm so grateful that she has Mom Laurel there to help as well as a husband and children who are so good to pitch in. David said that even McKay and Nathan are doing their best to help out. I know that Andrea would appreciate our prayers in her behalf.

My week was full of teary times, more so than I had expected it to be. I just kept thinking about a year ago and the details of Daddy's passing and the tender moments we shared as a family. I really appreciated Stephani coming to be with me last weekend. Steve had also offered to come but Stephani had already made plans to come so that freed Steve to take care of some of the demands on him at work. Linds and his boys and high priest quorum were involved finishing up a project for a fellow in their ward so Stephani came alone.

It was a sweet time together. Stephani is so good and wise (and cheerful and witty) that we spent the weekend laughing and crying. Saturday we drove to Rexburg and got SaraKay and went to lunch. After lunch we went with her to a practice room and she played some of her new pieces for us. She has the key to several practice rooms that have baby grand pianos but they fit so tightly in the room that there was hardly room for Steph and I. One room had a single chair that I sat on and Steph camped out on the floor. It was sweet to hear SaraKay play her pieces and occasionally Stephani would make a comment. SaraKay said that it was funny to hear a voice but not see anyone since Stephani was on the floor hidden from her view. Of course, that led into lots of witty comments and we got to laughing and that put an end to the practice session.

It was fun to see SaraKay's apartment and be on campus for a while with her. We gave her lots of tips on how to attract the boys (she told us that one girl had hit a boy with her car, breaking his leg, but that they started dating after that!) and lots of other wonderful advice and left Rexburg about 3:00 for home. That afternoon at four M. Russell Ballard was speaking at a fireside on campus and the Collegiate Singers were performing "Come unto Christ" with SaraKay accompanying.

We spent the balance of the day working on the computer and the scanner. Steph is really computer smart and by the time she finished she had scanned in all of 1990 family letters and part of '91's. Now I have to edit, cut, and paste them to the family letter folder, and continue on.

Yesterday it was a great comfort to have Steph with me in my Sunday meetings. I felt so vulnerable and like I was ready to shatter at the slightest provocation. Steph just hovered near and got me through the day. She bore her testimony and thanked the ward for their many kindnesses to me this past year. I appreciated that.

Thank you to each of you for your phone calls, letters, cards, and offers of help. It reminded me of something my sister, Kathy, said to me when

she and Dick were getting ready to leave on their mission. She gave me a big hug and said, "Sue, I really wanted to be here for you and help you through this difficult time. But you have good children and they will be there for you." She was so right. I have had a few blue days but invariably one of you will call and cheer me up or give me some advice that I needed to hear. Thank you to Dad's siblings, my siblings, and to each of you children for taking care of me.

I have my big community dinner tomorrow (we fed 343 last Tuesday), my temple day on Friday, helping with a reception that evening and then Anne Marie's baptism Saturday morning (weather permitting). On Sunday Elder Richard G. Scott will be at our stake conference and I am singing in a stake choir for the occasion. It will be the chance of a lifetime. On Monday, February 8th, Bonnie will be having surgery to implant the device that helps with pain relief. Her parents are going to stay following the baptism and help with the family for a few days. I'm sure Steve and Bonnie would appreciate your prayers in her behalf.

February 17, 2010

I'm trying to kill some time for the next 45 minutes until Mike and Marci and little ones arrive from Burley. They had to wait until Mike was through bishop-ing so they hoped they could get away by about four this afternoon. I've had a fun weekend already complete with my temple assignment, a trip to Rexburg to visit SaraKay, a fun Primary class, and watching the Olympics. You know how I enjoy the Olympics! There is just something so wonderful about seeing people from all over this planet come together in a spirit of competition and good will.

Of course, my favorite competitions are the couples and the individual skating. Yesterday I heard a commentary about people who participate in the winter Olympics and how they must have some "extreme gene" that propels them to participate in sports that are inherently so dangerous. I don't understand it but it's surely exciting to watch and sometimes almost heart-stopping. Hope all of you can enjoy a little of it before the two weeks are over.

Let me tell you about an experience SaraKay had last Friday. Her Collegiate Choir teacher asked her to audition for accompanying one of the songs they have been learning. He gave the music to her and one other student and said that he would check back with them later in the week. She was hesitant to take too much time learning it since she had to add that to her regular two-hour daily practice schedule. Towards the end of the week, he requested that she play it for him. As she started to play, he made suggestions and she responded. He was so thrilled with her ability and so complimentary that following the session she was walking on air as she left the music room and headed home. The thought went through her mind, "I've been working for 15 years for that moment!" She said it was such a triumph for all her years of developing her talent. It has been quite a "feather in her cap" to get to accompany as well as sing in this top choir. I will be going this Saturday to attend her concert and am excited for this first chance to hear them perform. I think SaraKay is feeling more at ease with her major and meeting lots of great kids.

The news from the Steve Larsen's of Wellsville and the David Larsen's of Boise is that both Bonnie and Andrea are on the mend. Bonnie has limited capacity for a few weeks until the wound heals but Steve and the kids are doing their best to pick up the slack around the house until she is stronger. David said that Andrea's headaches have been kept under control and that is very encouraging during these first few weeks following giving birth. When I called the other night, I could hear the family gathering in the kitchen and David said Andrea was up and about. Wonderful news!

I continue to spend time with my family history projects. Scanning, proof-reading, and consolidating these family letters has been almost addictive. It has certainly been a trip down memory lane and verified to me of the wonderful years I've had with Daddy at my side, raising our family and working towards our goals. I'm so excited to get these letters done that I'm having a hard time work on Dad's history. The biography takes a lot of brain power and the letters don't, so some days when I'm not in the mood to think I just work on the letters. It's a perfect project for a cold winter's day.

(Monday) Well, Mike and Marci arrived and we had an enjoyable evening, visiting and watching the Olympics. This morning we awoke to a light and gentle snowfall and of course, Amber and Ellie wanted to go out and play in it so some of the morning was spent with the girls and Mike and Marci outside in the snow. I was happy to be left inside taking care of little Olivia. She is just at that fun stage where she is so responsive and alert and wanting to be a part of all the action.

I had compiled my normal list of "honey-do's" and Mike tackled those projects in the afternoon for me. We all got good naps and had FHE and an early supper before they headed home. It was really a timely and sweet Valentine visit and lifted my spirits. Chasing those three rambunctious little girls keeps Mike and Marci on their toes!

I spent several hours yesterday on the computer working on Dad's history and I feel like I'm almost through. It isn't nearly as detailed and interesting as it would have been if he had written it himself, but it gives a fair representation of his life and interests and activities. I'm grateful for the monthly family letters that Barbara had the siblings write during the years from '78-90. They give a snap-shot of Daddy's thoughts and activities during that very busy but important time in our family's life.

This project has been very satisfying and has reaffirmed to me that the Lord is willing to give the help that I need. Many times I feel that I have "walked to the edge of the light" and don't know where to go next and the path before me has been illuminated enough that I can go a little further and continue on. I can certainly empathize with Mormon as he compiled the Book of Mormon from all the records handed down to him. I have gone through everything I could get my hands on and sorted it according to significance. And to think that Mormon didn't have access to Windows Vista!

I was telling SaraKay when she called that when I awoke and was getting ready to go walk at the stake center, I had two experiences come into my mind that I had somehow overlooked. I made myself notes and will get those included. I'm so grateful for the resources and time to do this.

Last night I watched the men's figure skating short program. Each participant and the music for their routine were unique. But as I have watched I have been impressed with the amount of classical and romantic period music that has been used even by the Asian performers. I thought how interesting that during the 1400-1800's the Lord saw fit to inspire much of this amazing music that has been enjoyed by millions throughout the generations! It continues to "speak" to our souls today. That is so profound to me and fills me with gratitude for a loving Father who is merciful and kind to His children and blesses us in so many ways!

February 23, 2010

The weather these last couple of days has been sunny but cold. My yard still has about two feet of snow covering most of it but in places the snow is melted and the grass beneath is exposed. It is a reminder to me of just how quickly time is passing and soon spring work will be underway. I've thoroughly enjoyed the confinement that the winter has brought and the freedom from yard work. Hopefully I've learned enough from last summer that this year won't be quite as traumatic for me.

Last weekend was really a sweet time for me. I spent a peaceful day at the temple on Friday. I'm getting secure enough with the memorization that it is so enjoyable to be in the initiatory area. If there is one thing that I sense when I am working with the sisters in initiatory, it is the feeling of acceptance and love that the Lord has for each patron. Sometimes as I look into their faces, that feeling is so overwhelming that it brings me to tears. Even though each sister is dressed in white and there is not a distinction that way, I am usually able to discern enough about them individually that I sense their longings and pain. It is a testimony to me of the Savior's deep concern and love for of each of us who approach him with clean hands and an honest heart, despite the situations in our lives and the challenges we wrestle with.

It is especially sweet to see the sisters literally "flock" to do initiatory work now that they can do so on a walk-in basis without having to be assigned. Some Fridays it is all we can do to handle all the sisters who come. It is a testimony to me that these sisters understand the promises and feel the need to be reminded of them so that they can face their challenges with courage and power. Aren't we fortunate to have the blessings of the temple in our lives!

On Saturday morning I attended our stake Relief Society Women's Conference. It was three hour-long seminars on "Love and Logic" (Russ and Linnea Hammond), Games and Party ideas for FHE, and Strengthening our Faith (President and Sister Gwynn). It was really excellent and I came home renewed. I so appreciate all the effort that was put into the presentations and loved being there.

That afternoon I left about three for Rexburg, arriving about four and taking SaraKay to Wendy's for supper before her concert that evening. She is having such a great experience this semester with

lots of strokes and encouragement from her professors. She was chosen to accompany a very difficult piece that the Collegiate Singers performed and she did a great job! Her choir director and the composer of the piece had a little photo shoot that included her. Later she told me that she has felt such joy in her classes and feels like she is finally starting to make sense of the music theory and other musicianship classes.

After we got back from Wendy's, she showed me several of her text books and work books. We got to laughing about how funny it was that she was so excited about her major and that that was what she wanted to share with me. Nothing could have made me happier!

Since she had a rehearsal before the concert, I sat in the lobby and waited for the doors to open. SaraKay had invited Bradley, Deniece's recently returned missionary son, to come to the concert. He had just moved to Rexburg and was job hunting and getting ready to start school the middle of April. He came early and it gave us a wonderful chance to visit before the concert. He is such a handsome, fine young man and I loved having the chance to ask him about his mission and other concerns. He is so upbeat and enjoyable to be with and I know that SaraKay will enjoy having some family on campus now. I guess Carolee is graduating in May and will be moving to Rexburg in June so that will be fun for the three of them.

After the concert we had a few minutes to visit before I headed home. I couldn't help thinking what a blessing it is for me to have SaraKay close enough that I get to be a part of her life. When people ask me how I am getting along and if I am lonely, I have to admit that I do get a little lonely but the majority of the time my kids just fill the void and I get along pretty well. In so many ways each of you as well as my ward members and Relief Society sisters reach out to me and that has been my salvation. Thank you. SaraKay, Marci and I are making a quick trip to Boise Saturday to support Laurel in her junior miss program that night. She is about "rehearsed out" and ready for it to be over.

March 8, 2010

I've had a quiet day just taking care of some business, searching for flights to Michigan in June, and planning out the next couple of months. Already the pace is picking up and I'm trying to get my schedule so that I can do all of the things I've committed to. Just searching for flights is enough to drive a person mad! I'm trying to learn how to navigate the web but sometimes I get stumped and can't figure out. I am getting a little better the more I experiment with it so I guess I should take consolation in knowing that I'm a lot more capable today than I was even a year ago.

I had a sweet week last week. Several of you remembered my anniversary and that was nice. I didn't have the emotional week that I had on the anniversary of Daddy's death. I don't know why but I just didn't. My friend, Leslie Mickelsen, whose husband died a year before Daddy, and who shares our anniversary, called on the afternoon of March 4th and asked if I wanted to go to dinner. I told her that I had a viewing that evening and she suggested that we just go somewhere locally so we did.

She is having quite a struggle and needed some time to talk. She has a different situation than I do and is grappling with all kinds of challenges that are not a part of my scenario. We visited about possible solutions and then I had a chance to tell her of some of my impressions and of the comfort I have felt during the past year. I don't know what she thought of it but I bore testimony (she is not a member) of the reality of the life after this one and that I felt very strongly that her husband was aware of her and concerned for her well-being. She thought that was very interesting. I need to include her more in my life. She is a lovely lady and searching right now for answers and peace.

I had my annual physical last week and got a clean bill of health. That is always a relief. I'm looking forward to the warm weather and the chance to get outside. I've spent the better part of the last two weeks at the computer and by nightfall I feel stiff from sitting so much. I don't know how you men do it who spend your days in front of a computer screen. I have really been pushing to get these histories as complete as possible and I'm close.

I've got a busy week ahead with a YW and YM senior dinner tomorrow night, a concert for SaraKay Wednesday night, Relief Society dinner on Thursday night, school musical on Friday, and a music teachers' concert and fund raiser on Saturday. All fun things!

March 16, 2010

I've spent part of the day outside getting started on yard work. It is so warm today that all I needed was a light sweater. There was not even a hint of

wind and the birds serenaded me the whole time I was raking. What a beautiful spring day! It certainly is nice to know that I've survived another Idaho winter and that warmer days are on the horizon.

Several weeks ago, I offered to babysit for Marci for her birthday and so after attending my meetings on Sunday I drove to Burley and sat in on a bishop's youth discussion at Mike and Marci's. It was fun to see them interact with the young people in their ward and then to visit over a treat that Marci had prepared. They are gracious hosts and it was obvious that the young people respond to them favorably.

Monday morning, I took care of Amber, Ellie, and Olivia while they went skiing at Pomerelle for Marci's birthday. We got along great. Olivia is really coming into her own and starting to crawl. She rolls around in her crib and when I would hear her awaken from her nap, I would go in to find her on her hands and knees looking through the slats of the crib with a big smile on her face! She is so responsive and doesn't want to miss out on a thing Amber and Ellie are doing. The skiers got home about 2:00 and we had a delicious ice cream cake before I left for home. it was such a beautiful day and an enjoyable trip.

As some of you are aware, SaraKay performed on Sunday with the Mormon Tabernacle Choir during the Spoken Word. Their choir, the Collegiate Singers, was invited as guests and not only performed on Sunday but were the entertainment for the "President's Banquet" on Saturday at the Joseph Smith Memorial Building. She said that President Eyring was the guest speaker but that Russell Ballard was also there and they got to shake their hands and visit with them. The dinner was for significant financial donors to the various Church schools.

After that engagement they had some time off to get acquainted and spent the night at a nearby hotel before attending an early morning practice with the Choir. She said that when they filed into the tabernacle the Choir was rehearsing and as they walked up the stairs to their assigned seats, she felt like she was in a wonderful dream!

Part way through the practice she began to feel dizzy and nauseous and the choir's nurse and doctor took her to a small room, but all of them agreed that it probably was just a combination of late nights and stress. She was afraid that she wouldn't be able to perform and she was silently praying that she would be able to shake it off. Fortunately, she did and joined the rehearsal and then sang during the performance. Their choir sang two numbers alone and then joined with the Choir for two others. It was truly a thrill to be in the midst of that auspicious group and be under the baton of Mack Wilberg!

Following the performance, when the cameras were off, the Choir stood and applauded them and it made them feel so special. She felt like she was walking on a cloud the rest of the day! Later that morning they attended a Salt Lake ward and performed during sacrament meeting and then one of the ward members had all of them over for Sunday dinner. She said it was a beautiful home and they were so generous to them. They left Salt Lake and arrived back in Rexburg about 5:30 on Sunday afternoon.

I left Blackfoot about 4:30 and was on my way to Burley when I saw a big tour bus with BYU-Idaho on the side pass on the other side of the freeway and I suspected it was their group. I felt my heart skip a beat as I saw it pass by. I knew from the text message SaraKay sent the night before that she was having a great time and I was so happy for this wonderful opportunity for her. Life is good.

March 21, 2010

I've had a productive week. The weather has, for the most part, been sunny and inviting. I've started cleaning all the dead grass, leaves, and branches strewn around the back yard as well as cleaning out the dead branches in the bushes along the driveway. It feels good to get outside and get started on things. I'm hoping to spread fertilizer on the lawn and Bare Spot on the gravel along the front of my property. I'm hoping to contract with my neighbor, Brent, to spray my pasture each time he does his and see if I can get rid of my thistle problem. They are troublesome in the pasture but especially obnoxious when they grow in the lawn. I got my rain gutters up and they look really nice. I'm thinking about pulling out my flowers in the front bed and putting some little bushes there that require less care. I'm not sure exactly what I am doing. I need to get in touch with Matt Reid and have him get the sprinkler system going. I suspect that we'll still have a few snow storms before it gets nice but it feels good to get a jump on the yard work.

I've loved my schedule these last two months in the temple. I have time to sit quietly and read the scriptures and if the session isn't too full, I also can go through a session as a patron. It's great to

see the complete spectrum of temple blessings. I do initiatory, assist in an endowment session, work at the veil, and then get to do a sealing session. It never ceases to amaze me how strong the Spirit is and how much I learn although I've heard it over and over again. What a thrill!

Saturday SaraKay arrived about 2:00 and we had a quick visit before she needed to get ready to be a bridesmaid at the reception for her friend, Tricia Mangum. Tricia married Josh Gwynn and SaraKay is also best friends with Josh's sister, Amy. They didn't have to stand in the line but had cute outfits, and held a beautiful bouquet of flowers as they mixed and mingled. She had a great time and arrived home about 8:30 to finish up some practicing, prepare a talk for sacrament meeting in her college ward, and a lesson for Relief Society. I went to bed about 10:30 but she didn't come in until about midnight and then she set her alarm for 4:00 so she could get up and finish her talk and lesson. I convinced her to sleep until five and then she got up, finished up her preparations and left here in the dark about six. It was hard to see her leave when I knew how little sleep she'd had but she called later today and said that she had survived both presentations and had had a good nap. It's hard to believe that she only has a little over two weeks left until the semester is over. Where has the time gone? She and Amy are moving to a new address for summer semester so she is looking forward to some new faces and acquaintances. She has really enjoyed her classes this semester and is nearly into her junior year credit-wise.

I got a sweet call from Staff this afternoon. He and Kaye have had a busy month. Kaye has had surgery on one knee but it hasn't slowed her down much. Staff's first wife, Kathy's, mother passed away and Staff's kids all attended the funeral. A lot of Kathy's cousins also were there and Kaye and Staff opened up their home for people to visit and stay during all the events surrounding the funeral. Staff has kept in close contact with the Wakefield's and had just spent some time with Kathy's mother and sister the week of Sister Wakefield's passing. It's wonderful to have sweet memories and things in order in our relationships. It's obvious that Staff and Kaye make a good team and it's great to see how happy they are!

After I sent out last week's letter, I got a short note from Gary. He was flying to Texas to help Ryan and McKenzie who are making their move to Fargo, North Dakota. They have a new little five-week-old baby and Ryan just finished up his doctorate. What an accomplishment and what an exciting time for them to be making a major change in their employment and residence. I hope they aren't running into all the flooding that I have seen going on in that area. I remember when Shauntel and Randy first moved to Iowa City, they couldn't get into their housing because of all the flooding. It was a real mess!

I received a phone call from my sister, Kathy. Dick is having some health problems and they will be coming home from their mission a couple of months early. They will be driving home, leaving Anchorage on April 8th. I'm sure it will be a beautiful drive for them. They have had a wonderful mission. Their letters make me tired just hearing about all they are doing.

I wanted also to mention that Josh placed third in state debate. That's quite an accomplishment for a sophomore! I think Stephani was ready to have it over and to have the year winding down. Between her job, family, and stake YW calling, she is kept hopping. I know she is ready for a summer break. Josh will be receiving his Eagle Award at a banquet on March 30th. Congratulations! I am going to go a little early and Linds is going to spend a couple hours with me seeing if we can get some pictures integrated into this history book I'm working on. He is confident that we can do it. I appreciate him finding time.

March 29, 2010

I've just been thinking how amazing it is that I can sit at my computer desk and watch a performance at a Midland Elementary School of my granddaughter, Beth. It's just wonderful what technology has done for keeping us connected. I've thought many times that my mother's two years in Pakistan would have been so much more enjoyable if we had had the technology that we now enjoy. It really makes you wonder what other amazing inventions are on the horizon and will transform the way we live.

I've been listening to the book "Truman" by David McCullough. I also read John Adams recently and have been amazed at the struggles and challenges of their respective times. It just reaffirms to me that there have always been difficult issues at home and abroad and that everyone has a different "take" on the solutions. I have been watching the health care debates and trying to sort out what is happening. I read an article the other day that said that everyone agrees that there is need for medical reform; that

our delivery system is out of whack; but the solutions are as varied as the individual agendas. Daddy used to say that every industry has the responsibility to police itself and that when it doesn't, other factions will wield power to police it externally. I'm not sure where this bill will take us but I feel a growing apprehension about the situation in Washington. (I've broken my own rule of not talking politics in a family letter. I know we have a lot of different political views in the family and I certainly don't want to alienate anyone but I would encourage all of you to study the issues.

The semester is winding down for SaraKay. I attended her last concert of the semester on Thursday. It was the Brahms "Requiem" with text from the scriptures. When Dr. Brower got the orchestra and the combined choirs together for one of their final rehearsals, he told the students that this requiem was Brahms' way of criticizing the Catholic church and its policies. He said that some of the other great composers shared a dislike for established religions of the day and many of them were able to voice dissent through their music. Whatever the case, I sat mesmerized by the sheer majesty of the music and felt a profound gratitude that the Lord saw fit to reveal this music so that generations could enjoy and find inspiration in it.

Dr. Kempton announced before the concert that as far as anyone could remember it was the first time that the requiem had been performed in Rexburg. SaraKay was worried that we (Peggy Hansen was with me) would be bored because she said that she saw people in the audience yawning throughout the performance, but Peggy and I thoroughly enjoyed the evening.

I was able to get a little yard work done before the cold and wet weather set in last week. It felt good to get outside for a change although I'm not looking forward to the months of yard work ahead. I've got a few ideas for simplifying my life this summer so we'll see how I get along.

I'm looking forward to conference and Easter weekend. SaraKay has her piano juries early next week and finals so she is coming home with the goal of practicing the piano and preparing for tests. It's always a double treat to have conference come on Easter Sunday. What a wonderful way to celebrate the life and mission of the Savior. How different our lives would be without the knowledge we have of the plan of salvation and eventual reuniting with our loved ones! The gospel is full of hope and joy and I'm so grateful for it in my life.

April 4, 2010

The big news of the week was Sam's ordination to be an Elder and Josh receiving his Eagle award on Tuesday. Katie drove up from Provo for the occasion and Steve and Bonnie and family, me, and the Bennion grandparents were also there for the big occasion. The Court of Honor was in conjunction with their troop's celebration of the 100th anniversary of scouting and so it included a dinner, decorations, and program. Linds had created a DVD that showed pictures of Josh from the time that he was a toddler and it really tugged at my heartstrings. Where does the time go? Anyway, it was very sweet to be a part of the celebration and to honor these two fine Bennion boys!

I drove home later that evening and arrived safe and sound with no problems or incidents. I spent most of Wednesday preparing for a wedding shower for Brittany Fife on Friday night. I knew that Thursday was going to be busy with our assignments to speak at a dinner that night and so I wanted to get everything ready in advance. SaraKay arrived home Thursday night about six and we drove together in to the Reception Center for the dinner. It was fun to speak on the same program as SaraKay and we felt good about how it turned out.

SaraKay left about 9:30 to return to Rexburg and I told her to call me when she arrived. When she didn't call, I got worried; when she finally called about 11:10 she said that she had run into a snow storm between Blackfoot and Idaho Falls that really slowed her down. I was grateful that she had arrived safely.

Friday I had my temple assignment and it proved to be an exhausting day. I was a follower for one of the sessions and we had so many incidents and complications that it took us an extra half an hour to complete the session. When I described to Brenda Godfrey enroute home some of the situations we dealt with, she said that it sounded like I had a tough initiation to my new responsibilities. The whole day was a little like that so when I arrived home I was really wiped out! Fortunately, everything was ready for the wedding shower and it went off without a hitch.

SaraKay arrived home earlier than I did so she was getting started on her practicing and we were both feeling a lot of stress over the weekend

ahead. She needed to do about 10 hours of piano practicing over the weekend (to get her A in the class) and since she doesn't practice on Sundays, it made for a crazy Friday and Saturday. Yesterday we watched conference and then she'd practice and then we'd watch another session and then she'd practice again and then we'd have a meal and she'd practice again. She was supposed to go with me to the Junior Miss program last night but she just couldn't do it and finish up her hours so I went alone. By 11 last night she had 1/2 hour left to go and so I read my scriptures while she finished up and we both fell into bed.

Today was very restful and a good break from the busy week. Conference was wonderful! We just relaxed and tuned in for all the sessions. What a feast! The only problem was that SaraKay slept through much of it. I had to keep waking her up and then she'd fall asleep again. This week is finals so she is hoping to come home Saturday night and sleep all next week before starting in again on the 20th. (College kids!)

Seriously, she will finish up Saturday after Collegiate Choir sings at BYU-I graduation that afternoon and then she will be home for a week before she needs to be back for classes. She is moving to another apartment complex so some of the week will be used up making that change. She is excited to meet some new people and broaden her horizons a little with this apartment change.

We have had very unsettled weather but things cleared off today and I'm hoping for some decent weather so I can get some more yard work done. On Friday night we had about three inches of snow and a lot of wind. We have had such a dry spring that the moisture is welcome but this time of the year it is always a little discouraging to have it so cold and miserable. Tomorrow morning I'm helping the Moreland 5th Ward choir sing for Gale Taylor's funeral.

Stephani is coming tomorrow to help me with some family history work. Hopefully she can get me and my computer set up so I can insert pictures in these histories that I have finished. It has been an enormous task to get them ready to go and I just hope that adding pictures doesn't bring me to a standstill. I really appreciate her and Linds trying to "teach an old dog new tricks."

Becky called and said that there had been an earthquake in northern Mexico and that they had felt some aftershocks in Chandler. She didn't actually feel it but just noticed that the water in their swimming pool had swished back and forth enough to splash water out onto the deck and she couldn't figure out what was going on. She assured me that they were all right but I'm wondering about Mexico. It measured 6.9 at the epicenter.

April 11, 2010

Hopefully most of you received the email regarding my sister, Kathy, and her husband Dick. They were on their way home from their mission in Anchorage, Alaska, when they had an accident and the car flipped onto its top and spun around (like a top) several times. When it finished spinning, Kathy and Dick were suspended upside down in their seatbelts but Kathy was able to unfasten hers, climb out, and wave down a passing car for help. Dick was wedged in and unable to move. They were 300 miles from Whitehorse, British Columbia, and 2300 miles from Seattle, Washington when it happened. They were in a very remote area and realized how fortunate they were to even have a car come along just minutes after Kathy was able to free herself from the wreckage. She said the first car that stopped had a registered nurse in it and the second car had a fireman. Soon thereafter a long-haul truck came along and the driver had a satellite phone and was able to locate an emergency response team and stay with her until help arrived. Dick was secured and transported to the nearest hospital (300 miles away) and then life-flighted to a trauma center in Seattle. Kathy traveled with him, leaving behind all their suitcases and other possessions in their impounded car. She arrived in Seattle with the clothes on her back and her computer which she was able to get from their totaled car.

So began their drama in Seattle as doctor's assessed the situation and surgery was scheduled for this morning. One of the tender mercies of the experience was that Nate and Maureen were in Seattle for a wedding and able to get to the hospital, give some support, and then help Kathy get to a store and pick up something to wear. Kathy's mission president was also in Seattle, having flown in for a mission president's seminar. When he was notified of the accident, he went to the hospital and talked things through with Kathy regarding their car and belongings and insurance issues. Before he left for home following the seminar, he visited again and told Kathy and Dick that they were mentioned by name in the prayers offered by the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve in their meetings.

Dick had surgery this morning. Originally, they were going to put a halo on him to stabilize the spine but when they got into surgery, the injury was so severe that they decided the only safe course was to do the most extreme procedure available and they replaced the discs between the fractured vertebrae, and put in titanium plates. During recovery this whole area will fuse together and ensure that the spinal column will not in any way be compromised. The doctors said that they had seldom seen so much damage without paralysis of some sort.

Again, Kathy felt that they had been spared; that it could have been so much worse if everyone involved in the recovery effort and surgery had not done just the right thing in a timely manner. When the doctor visited with her after the surgery, he said that as soon as Dick can handle getting up and walking, that he would be released to go home. They even cleared him to fly on a plane, although Kathy knows that it is going to be a marathon. Abby is flying in from Maine and will be at the airport to help get Dick home once they arrive. That is certainly wonderful news. It is hard being involved in an accident any time but to be so far from home and from loved ones and the support of your ward family is especially difficult. Kathy sounded good and was encouraged that maybe in a couple of days they will be home-bound. Dick has about three months ahead of recuperation time but just being able to walk and move is such a blessing! Remember them in your prayers.

Saturday SaraKay arrived home with her car packed to the ceiling and the process of regrouping for another semester began. Saturday night was her friend, Brittany Fife's, wedding reception and it was fun to go with her to that. Saturday morning I worked on a cleaning detail at the Methodist Church, totally cleaning the kitchen that had been used each Tuesday night for the multi-denominational Community Dinner Table project, October through March. There was supposed to be a big group gather to do the cleaning but ended up only being seven of us and four of the seven were from the LDS stakes in the area. I am always grateful for the work ethic that the LDS people exhibit. It was a busy morning but I think some good will was shown and that is our purpose in participating in this community event.

My family history project continues. Stephani, bless her generous heart, took a couple days of her spring break and came on Monday to help me learn how to import pictures into the document. She made me do the "driving" and she sat at my side for hours, talking me through the process. She was so patient with me and between the two of us we scanned and imported photos and a newspaper article, recovered the scans from the designated files, and then carefully cut, cropped, and placed the photos into position. We didn't go to bed until almost midnight and even then we had to solve some problems regarding the page specifications of the publisher, Blurb.com.

By the time she left Tuesday morning I felt like I was ready to crumble. I kept thinking, if the Lord could part the Red Sea, then he can enlighten me to accomplish this task. After Steph left, I got right back on the computer and got going again and did the same thing on Wednesday. By Wednesday afternoon I had come up against a problem.... getting the pictures from Picasa and finding a way to insert them. When John called on his way home from work, he talked me through it and I got that to work, too. Wonder of wonder, miracle of miracles.

Although this whole project has taken far longer than I ever anticipated, Linds and Steph have encouraged me to include photos. It will be more "reader friendly" if there are pictures in the text so although it is taking longer, it will be worth it.

One of the interesting things I have realized as I have done this is how few pictures we used to take. Nowadays, with all the wonderful digital cameras, all of us take pictures of everything. But, in years gone by, pictures were expensive and rare. I regret that I didn't have more pictures of both Daddy and I growing up but I don’t so we'll go with what we have. I appreciate Shauntel and Becky proofing the manuscript. I'm reminded as I work with my kids on this that I've got a bunch of smart kids!

I had a sweet and short interlude to my day on Wednesday when Stephani and Josh met me at Wingers for lunch. Josh has completed driver's training and he has been driving around Cache Valley with a parent trying to get in his required hours behind the wheel before he can get his license. He suggested to Steph that they drive to Blackfoot and back, clocking about four more hours and so they called and invited me to lunch with them before they headed home. What a fun time!

This week I am going to put SaraKay to work helping get some yard work done if the weather permits. I will have my temple day on Friday and

then fly out from Idaho Falls on Saturday morning for Chandler to help with the Seely children while Chet and Becky go for a get-away, courtesy of Isogenix, until Tuesday. I will be home Wednesday evening. I'll keep my phone charged so call me if you need me. I'll keep you posted on Kathy and Dick. Love to all.

April 19, 2010

I am sitting here in Becky's dining room typing on her laptop and trying not to make any typos because I haven't found the "back" key yet. I arrived on Saturday afternoon and had the evening with Becky and kids before she flew out early Sunday morning to meet up with Chet who had spent the week in New York on business. She had written me a three-page memo complete with several maps charting my way to schools, church, soccer, tennis, etc. She took me for a trial run Saturday night, explaining some of the idiosyncrasies of driving on AZ highways. The longer we were out and about the more nervous I became and I think she could sense that I was maxed out and needed a good night's sleep.

On Friday night SaraKay and her friends attended a play in Blackfoot and then brought the party home for another couple of hours. Try as I might I couldn't get to sleep until the last of the guests left and SaraKay came to bed. By that time, it was nearly one a.m. and of course, we had to visit a few minutes and then I finally took a sleeping pill to get myself to settle down.

On Saturday morning she left for Rexburg just minutes before I left for the Idaho Falls airport. By the time I had parked and checked in and got situated it was nearly noon. I always feel my "widowhood" when I'm on my own traveling and this time was no different. I am really a creature of habit and don't like to go too far out of my comfort zone and traveling always does that to me. I try to stay calm but inevitably I feel like a fish out of water.

It was fun to attend Becky's ward with the kids and to hear the "rave reviews" of ward members and their appreciation for the Seely's. It was especially nice to meet several of Becky's good friends and put faces with names. I was very impressed with all the meetings and the quality of teaching. They have a great mix of old and young and a lot of vitality. Of course, I am always amazed at the diversity in both Arizona, Iowa, and Michigan and am reminded again each time I visit just how diversified America is and that living in Idaho certainly isn't representative of the country as a whole. I volunteered in Cole's classroom this afternoon and wanted to just sit and talk to each of the children and ask them about their backgrounds because it was obvious that there were lots of nationalities represented. What fun and how broadening that is.

Becky and Chet will be returning from Mexico tomorrow night and I will fly out about noon on Wednesday. They have a great situation here and I can see why they like it in Chandler. But, then, I feel that way about each one of you when I visit you and get a little peek into your lives. This world is full of wonderful places and people. (I keep reminding myself of that each time I think about John and Laurel and family going back to China.) By now most of you know that they are going to Shanghai with John leaving in July and Laurel following in August when school is ready to start. They were all excited when John and Laurel broke the news to the kids a couple weeks ago so I guess that is a good sign. I know from what John has told me that Shanghai is much more westernized and has about six LDS branches so they won't have the isolation that they did in Chungcheong. I'm sure that is a relief to Laurel. I'm determined that this time I will get there before they return so I'm already making plans.

Most of you are aware that Kathy and Dick are home safe in Utah and Dick is recovering nicely although it is slow going. The doctors agreed that it was nothing short of a miracle that Dick doesn't have some paralysis. He was operated on and a couple days later was released to fly home to Utah. As far as I know, the mission personnel in Seattle helped Kathy get where she needed to be and Abby and Lane were waiting to assist in SLC when they arrived. Last time I talked to Kathy they were settling in and she was upbeat and relieved to have most of the ordeal behind them. I told her that after I got home from Becky's I would call and check in with her. Abby will be with them until the first week in May so that will be a huge help.

April 26, 2010

It's a beautiful day outside. The rain of the last few days has greened everything up and the trees are budding out. Of course, all the green translates into yard work but it still brings a sense of excitement with the changing season.

I arrived home from Becky's Wednesday evening. When I made my connecting flight in SLC the airport was teaming with passengers waiting

for flights to be reopened. The intense thunder and rain storms across much of the northwest had closed down airports and some of the passengers had been waiting for 4-6 hours for flights to Denver, Spokane, Seattle, Billings, and Twin Falls. I felt so fortunate to have just arrived about the time that the flights were starting up again so I had only about a half hour delay before we were able to take off for Idaho Falls. Although the sky was looking ominous, we arrived without incident and I was soon on my way home.

I have decided that Arizona is a foreign country. There were so many things that were so bizarre that I could hardly believe it. And then, of course, with Chet and Becky being on the leading edge of technology in their lives, I was having to deal with talking alarm clocks, aquaponic gardens, a GPS (Peggy) that rescued me more than once, and other devices that perplexed me. I felt keenly the generation gap and am reminded that my grandchildren are living in a very different world than I am. As a senior citizen who is comfortable with yester-year, I know I was as novel to the Seely children as all their gimmicks were to me. Well, anyway, we had a good laugh over my foray into their totally modern world.

My first encounter was Tate's voice activated alarm clock. You just push the button and this woman asks you what you want (within reason) and you tell her to set the alarm. Then she asks you what kind of an alarm you want (buzzer, ring, etc.) and then she asks the time. That all sounds very simple but I could not get her to respond to my voice and I was ready to strangle her (or it) when she kept getting my commands wrong. Finally, I got Maddie and Tate and they thought I was so funny to be so frustrated with the whole situation and then Maddie tried and got the same responses I did. We were all laughing so hard at the crazy responses we were getting and then Tate took over and it was like he had a personal relationship with his clock. He smooth-talked her back on track and got the alarm set for the appropriate hour. I'm still trying to figure out how this voice machine is any more efficient than twisting a knob and pulling out a button, but I guess it is.

And then there was the challenge of finding my way to and from two schools, the church, and the tennis club. Becky had given me detailed maps which I studied carefully but being behind the wheel in fast traffic isn't the ideal time to try to recall the intricacies of a map, especially when separated turn lanes and bricked median strips aren't the norm in Utah/Idaho. More than once Maddie's navigation saved us all from sure death and made a believer out of the kids that family prayer in the morning when Grandma is behind the wheel is an absolutely necessary!

Of course, if all else failed, I just pulled over to the side of the road and pushed "Home" and Peggy talked me through the maze of urban sprawl and streets that Brigham didn't lay out on a nice North-South-East-West grid. And if I did overshoot a turn within a few seconds, I would hear Peggy (sounding a bit perturbed) say, "Recalculating." Anyway, I did survive the clock, the traffic, the school idiosyncrasies, and all the other things that Arizonians take for granted but which left this Idahoan totally fazed!

Aside from that, the weather was beautiful; the people, gracious and friendly; the ward, kind and sweet; and the Seely children, a delight! When Becky and Chet arrived home Tuesday night sun tanned and refreshed, I felt rescued and was able to relax and know that Becky would be doing the driving from then on. She is a master at finding her way around (from her days behind the wheel in Seoul, Korea) and the traffic is never a concern for her.

Wednesday morning with the kids in school and Chet at work, we sat in the swing in her back yard, basked in the beautiful Arizona weather, and talked for hours about all those things that are dear to our hearts and concerns in our lives. I knew she had a million things to do and places to go and company arriving the next day but she put it all aside and found time for a wonderful chat. Then she drove me to the airport, made sure I was properly checked in and headed for the right departure gate, and sent me on my way.

On Friday night SaraKay arrived home for a dress rehearsal with the community orchestra. She spoke in Laurel Conference Saturday morning, performed at the concert Saturday night, attended a missionary farewell Sunday morning, and was here when Mike and Marci arrived that afternoon for a short but very fun visit. After dinner we bundled up in coats and blankets and went out to sit in the swing and visit while Mike kept both Amber and Ellie occupied on the jungle gym and swings. When it got just too cold for even blankets and coats (don't you just love Idaho weather!) we retreated to the basement and watched Dumbo while we kept the visiting going. It was so fun and filled my Sabbath with wonderful sweetness!

At around eight o'clock, the Larsens of Burley left, the home teachers arrived, and SaraKay's roommates arrived to catch their ride back to BYU-I.

May 4, 2010

I've spent the day getting organized for the weeks ahead. All at once the month of May has arrived and with it all the activities that are so much a part of the winding down scene before summer. Last Monday I mowed the lawn and got things sprayed. Fortunately, I did it on Monday because for the rest of the week it was cold, windy, and rainy. This week is starting off much the same so it makes it hard to keep up with the yard work. Don Scott came and tilled my garden with his handy little tractor and it looks nice.

Little by little I am learning what I'm doing around here. Last year I felt like I sprayed weeds all summer long and never did get a solid kill. The other day I called my friend, Dale, at CAL Ranch about something to treat the Canadian thistle with and in the course of the conversation I learned that the weed killers like Round-Up and 2-4-D lose their potency over time especially if they are stored in the cold over a winter. This explains why I had so many troubles last summer with getting a good kill. I hated to throw out all the old chemicals but hopefully I can see better results this year. I also discovered a handy little gadget called a Dial-A-Spray that you attach to a hose and apply the chemicals that way without all the mixing and pumping of the normal hand sprayer. It sprays a wide swath and takes me a fraction of the time to get things covered. I've really felt like I'm finding answers to my problems, line upon line.

Saturday night I drove to Rexburg and attended the inaugural festivities for the new grand piano that the Eliza R. Snow association presented to BYU-I. SaraKay was one of 12 students who had been invited to perform on the program. Earlier in the week she was having second thoughts about performing and I had to talk her into it. She is not taking piano lessons this semester and so she didn't feel like she had the time to brush up on her piece enough to feel confident. I knew her piano teacher, Dr. Jones, would be very disappointed if she didn't and so I really talked to get her to do it. The piece she played was a Brahms number and she had previously had a problem with memorizing it so she was worried that she would have a memory lapse. We were both pretty up tight by the time we got to the event and it was such a relief when she played it with only one small mistake. She was so glad she did it and after the program she got to visit for a few minutes with President Clark and his wife. That about made her day! She likes her new classes, roommates, apartment, and ward although it is hard to start over with a new ward when she was finally getting to feel at home with her old one. Hopefully the transition will go smoothly.

On Monday I spent the afternoon with Bonnie and kids. It was a fun day to be there. I was able to catch up on all the kids' activities and plans. Their house is as busy as all the rest of your homes with homework, music lessons, and all the places to go and things to do. Bonnie is able to sit now and is very optimistic about the device giving her the help she needs. Steve arrived home from work about the time I left to go to Josh's final symphony concert of the year. I felt badly to miss time with Steve but they are coming the Sunday of Memorial Day weekend so we will get in some visiting then.

Josh's concert was so amazing. I loved every minute of it! Following the concert, we went for ice cream and then visited at home. Sam has nearly completed his second semester and is in the process of filling out mission papers. It was fun to visit with him about all he's involved with.

One of the surprises of the weekend was when Tim called and said that he had a date with a girl in Pocatello and that he wanted to stay Friday night. We have some time to visit Saturday before he headed back to Mike's and some activities there. I was delighted to have him come and he helped me with several of the computer questions that I had.

This week I will work both Friday and Saturday in the temple. Friday night is the stake high priest's banquet and I'm going to plan to attend that. Saturday night I will be home after 8:00 from the temple. I will be leaving Sunday morning to go to Mike and Marci's for Mother's Day and then continue on to Boise for a couple of days. If you plan to call me for Mother's Day, try to do it Saturday evening after eight as I will be traveling much of the day and don't want to use up my battery visiting. I always feel safer knowing I have my phone charged up before I go on these long trips.

May 12, 2010

I returned an hour ago from my Burley/Boise trip. It was such a thrill to visit Mike/Marci and

their little ones as well as David/Andrea and their bunch. I arrived in Burley Sunday morning and attended meetings in Mike's ward and even got in on Amber's first performance in sacrament meeting as the Primary children sang to all the mothers and grandmothers in the congregation. It was very touching and I thoroughly enjoyed being surrounded by a busy little family on Mother's Day. Marci had prepared a delicious meal for us and Mike took time off from his bishop-ing to be home and make the day special for his wife and me.

Just before leaving Burley, I mentioned to Mike that enroute from Blackfoot I had three lights go on indicating that I had a problem. They hadn't been on Saturday when I drove home from the temple and I wasn't sure what they meant. He checked and said that one was the "Check Engine" light and the other two were "Trac" and "VSC." He didn't want me to continue on to Boise with the chance that something was wrong and I might get stranded. He called a fellow in his ward who is the auto guru in the area and he very graciously consented to bring his diagnostic machine over, hook it up to my car, and let me know if I should continue on. I felt badly asking for help on a Sunday but appreciated his willingness and he was soon at Mike's offering assistance. The only problem his machine spotted was that my gas tank lid wasn't screwed on tightly. That made sense to me since I had filled my tank late Saturday night after returning from my temple assignment. The lid was on but not twisted tightly and he said that sometimes the car computer will pick up on that and hence the "Check" light. He advised me to get my car in for a brake check because the other light had something to do with my airlock brakes, but he said he thought I was good to go. What a relief! I continued on to Boise, grateful for Mike and Marci's thoughtfulness and that of their ward member. Few things unnerve me like car problems and knowing that I am alone and could be stranded somewhere along I-15. I have a AAA Auto membership and towing privileges but this still is always an issue when I travel very far.

I arrived after most of the family had gone to bed so David and Andrea and I had some quiet time to sit and visit and go over the schedule for the next couple of days. Islay was still awake and of course, I had to do some "loving" on her before she settled for the night. She is still a tiny little mite but has such a sweetness about her and so contented. She is only 3 1/2 months old but very alert. I couldn't help but compare her with Olivia who is 10 months and crawling all over and such a busy, involved little person. What fun for both of them at reunion times when they get a little older.

Dave and Andrea's household reminded me of a well-oiled machine. Between end-of-school projects, music lessons, dance and swim lessons, Joy School, and a myriad of other commitments, we were on the run! Anna Sue has early morning seminary so she and David were gone by 6:15 each morning with the rest of the household up and going not long after. It was a real beehive of activity, but all wonderful things and great opportunities for their children. One thing Andrea attended was kindergarten registration for McKay. Time marches on and a year from now Laurel will be graduating and heading off to college!

It has been very satisfying these last few weeks to spend time with so many of you children. I arrived home from a sweet visit to Becky's just a couple of weeks ago, made a trip to Logan to visit both Steph and Steve's families in conjunction with some activities going on there, spent an evening with SaraKay the night of her piano performance, and then stayed with both Mike and David and their families as well as time with Tim over Mother's Day weekend! I came home grateful for each one and for the good I see in your lives. I also appreciated hearing from each of you over the holiday and express thanks to you for your cards, letters, emails, gifts, and other gestures of love and appreciation. I had a truly great weekend thanks to each of you.

Let me mention that I am gearing up for company the weekend of Memorial Day. At this point I think that Mike and Marci will arrive either Sunday afternoon or Monday morning and Steve and Bonnie are coming Sunday afternoon and spending night and then Bonnie and the kids visiting with her family while Steve spends Monday here with me helping with some projects. I would welcome one and all but need to know so I can plan. Whenever you can come and if you can come, we'll spend some time at the cemetery as well as have some good visiting time together.

In closing I want to include a part of a card I received from Paul… one of many that I received from you kids that brought a chuckle or tear.

"Mom, Happy Mother's Day!" Tonight for family night Jenny taught us about mothers and asked what we've learned from our mothers. Here's just a few things that came to

mind: 1. Recognize the Lord's hand in all things. 2. Be compassionate, especially to those who are less fortunate. 3. A good worker sees what needs to be done and does it. 4. Gardens bring joy and satisfaction. 5. Don't sit down while weeding the garden. 6. Prepare church lessons a week in advance. 7. Plan ahead and prepare. 8. If a BB gun doesn't do the job, try a sledgehammer. 9. Prayer can make miracles happen. 10. Just keep going. Never give up.

Thanks, Paul, and all of you for filling my life with joy.

May 17, 2010

I just read Laurel's blog and enjoyed her recounting of the weeks' activities. It makes me tired just thinking about everything on her "to do" list. I'm sure Becky can empathize completely. Come to think of it...just thinking about everything everyone is involved in this time of year makes me tired! Maybe I'll go take another nap!

I've spent the day going from Jiffy Lube to Countryside Tire trying to be sure that my car is ready for my trip to Salt Lake this Sunday. I am going to stay Sunday night with Dick and Kathy and then Monday I'm having lunch with Kathy and Deniece, returning to Deniece's' and then traveling with my high school friend, Louise Taysom, to the Lion House for dinner with my high school friends Monday night. (My friend, Renee Hawkley is serving a mission at the Family History Library and got permission to join us for dinner). I will then spend the night at Deniece's and travel home Tuesday morning. I know it will be fun but the traveling always gives me worry so I'm trying to ensure that all those lights that went on enroute to Boise, don't go on again.

As you might imagine, I just love going to Jiffy Lube. Especially when a technician has me stand by his computer while he asks me questions such as, "Since your car now has passed the 100,000-mile mark, would you like to have your transmission fluid flushed?" or "Look at your air filter. Would you like to replace it since it is getting dirty?" On these occasions I try to look intelligent, but I don't have the foggiest idea if I want my transmission flushed or how dirty an air filter is supposed to be before it's time for a replacement. Woe is me!

I did stop at Countryside Tire and have Rodney Love take a look at things and I'm taking the car in tomorrow for a couple of things that need doing. It's been good to have Gary and Rod aware of my needs and willing to take time to explain things.

My two days at the temple about wore me out. By the time I finished up Saturday night I was pretty beat. I loved our Saturday devotional with the temple president, President Stoddard. He talked to us about how he loved to finish out his temple day in the Celestial Room. He said that often when he is there patrons will approach him and ask about certain aspects of the endowment or other temple ordinances. He said that he tells them what one of The Twelve told them in their training. *"There are things that go on in the temple that we do not speak of outside of the temple. There are things that go on in the temple that we do not speak of inside the temple. There are many things that we just do not understand. We gain insights into the symbolism of the temple ordinances as we are tutored by the Spirit and much we accept on faith."* I love that.

My family history project has come to a halt these last two weeks with all I've had going on with Trek preparations. Yesterday I spent several hours getting my musical groups lined up, music copied and distributed, and people contacted. The Trek fireside on June 13th has been a major concern. The leadership wanted a song emphasizing the family history aspect of this Trek and I had music to "The Hearts of the Children" but it only has one verse. After practicing with Sue Johnson, we decided that I would try to come up with some words that we could use for two other verses since it is so short and the music has three verses (flute, etc.) but only one set of words. I spent a little time last night trying to come up with some words but was largely unsuccessful. I ask the Lord to help me when I had my personal prayers and this morning, I awoke about 5:30 with some words going through my head. I hurried and got a pencil and paper and jotted down the ideas and later was able to quite easily get them to fit. What a blessing and an answer to prayer.

Congratulations to Beth on her recent baptism. Laurel mentioned that they attended and Jenny's folks were also going to be there for it. I'm sure it was a special day for their family. Next special event is the arrival of a new little one at Paul and Jenny's in June. Remember Jenny in your prayers. School is winding down for everyone and summer vacation is on the horizon.

May 26, 2010

I've had a busy but enjoyable weekend. SaraKay had two mission homecomings on Sunday so she

arrived home about 1:00 on Saturday afternoon and we had time to visit and catch up on all her news. Nate called a couple of days before and arranged to come after he finished up at work on Saturday so he arrived at about four and we had a thoroughly enjoyable time together. He and Tanner are working on a chapel in Shelley (the one I attended while living in the 3rd Ward years ago) and they rent a small apartment and take turns going home every other weekend. Chad's construction company is the one in charge of the job so Nate, Chad and Tanner have worked together on it and enjoyed it.

While Nate was here, we walked around the yard and he gave me some advice on some of my concerns. He asked why my riding mower was parked in the garage and I mentioned that I had to have it close so that I could jump start it each time I mowed. When Ralph Jensen serviced it last year he said that the batteries in these mowers can't be replaced, just charged; but when Nate checked it he saw that it was six years old and he removed it and said that he would get me another one. He mentioned that riding mowers parked in garages are a major safety hazard. He had some friends who had a fire start in their garage with their mower and it spread to the rest of the house and they lost everything. I had never thought of that possibility but was grateful for the advice. Nate is coming tonight to put in the new battery and get me up and running. I had just run out of my thread on my weed whacker and he showed me how to do that, too.

On Sunday as we were driving home from church, he commented that he smelled antifreeze and wanted to check things out before I left for Salt Lake that evening. I couldn't imagine that I had a problem since I had spent nearly $400 at both Jiffy Lube and Countryside Tire earlier in the week, assuring that everything was in tip-top shape. When we opened the hood, the container for the antifreeze/water was nearly empty. I knew that Jiffy Lube had topped it off on Monday so I was puzzled how it could be nearly empty. Nate filled it back up and showed me what to do if I had the car over heat enroute to Utah later that afternoon.

By five SaraKay was on her way back to Rexburg, Nate was leaving for Shelley, and I had a rehearsal for my Trek music groups. Later I left for Kaysville and had an uneventful trip. With all the rain the area has received lately, everything was so beautiful and green. The drive was pleasant and I arrived at Deniece's at about 9:30 and we had a good visit before retiring for the night. Carolee had a boyfriend over and they were working on one of their final school assignments of the year. She is graduating this week and will be moving to Rexburg the first week of June. Wow! It doesn't seem possible that Don and Deniece are nearly empty-nesters!

On Monday morning Deniece and I had a leisurely morning and traveled to Kathy's and then went to lunch together. It was so fun to have the time to sit and visit over lunch and catch up on family news. Following lunch, we returned to Kathy's and visited until nearly four. It was interesting to see the pictures that were taken by the missionaries who were assigned to clean out their car following the accident in Canada. It is truly miraculous that they survived and that Dick is able to be up and around. He wears a neck brace but is pretty mobile and life is settling down for them. Kathy made the comment that following the accident it was comforting to have both Nate and Charles so attentive and ready to lend a hand. She also mentioned that prior to their departure from Alaska the missionaries were fasting and praying for them and that they had so many tender mercies during the week of the accident that she wrote a letter to the mission expressing gratitude for their faith and prayers in their behalf.

At about four Deniece drove me to Temple Square and I met up with my high school girl friends and we visited over dinner. The restaurant wasn't crowded and the waitress said it was fine to stay for as long as we wanted so we visited until nearly nine. My friend, Louise, lives in Layton so when we were through, she dropped me off at Deniece’s and continued on to her own place. It was just a wonderful day full of sweet visits and renewing acquaintances.

Renee is serving a mission on Temple Square as a librarian of the Curriculum department and she talked through with me the expenses, the daily routine and expectations, and the restrictions. It sounds like they are very lenient with the senior missionaries and if family emergencies happen, it is easy to receive permission to get a leave of absence. I am trying to figure out just what I would need to do to leave after our family reunion next summer. Deniece's son, Brent, is going to be attending ISU next year to get his Master's Degree and we have talked some of them living here and taking care of things for me but that is up in the air as yet so I'm just putting out some feelers for now.

Deniece is always such a gracious hostess. I so appreciated the hospitality that she extended and the chance to see Don again. They really enjoy their situation there in Kaysville and are settling in and hoping to retire there when the time comes.

Monday night I received a phone message from Wright Hanks' daughter informing me of his passing that day. He has been sick for a couple of weeks and in a care center and passed peacefully that afternoon. He had asked that our family be notified since he appreciated the kindness and consideration he was shown during the time he was dating Mom. I have made arrangements to attend the viewing on Thursday although my temple assignment on Friday interfered with attending the funeral services. I guess that closes out the final chapter of the Ilene/Wright story. Life certainly moves forward and before we know it, our time on earth is over.

I took Nate with me to see Daddy's grave since he hadn't seen the headstone yet and we talked through refurbishing Allan and Barbara's headstone so the lettering is sharp and crisp. I have several floral arrangements ready to put on the graves but the weather has been so windy and rainy that I am hesitant to do it much before Memorial Day weekend. Both headstones were covered with bird droppings and that was as it was last year. I guess that is to be expected with all the trees around but it upsets me to see the headstones messed up like that and I'm going to go over later today and clean them up.

I received an email from John and Laurel. They attended the Shanghai ward on Sunday and it is a vibrant young ward with lots of Primary children and big YW and YM groups. They loved the ward and today were going to look at schools and even spend some time in the factory where John will work. They were very encouraged by what they saw and feel that this experience will be much more pleasant than their last one. As of now, John is to start the end of July and so they will be arriving about the time school starts for the kids. I am still checking on flights for our China trip but they are up around $1500 and I don't know if that is negotiable or not. John told me that he and Laurel traveled Business Class and that their tickets were $7,000 apiece! Thank goodness Ford picks up the tab.

June 1, 2010

(Sunday) It's a beautiful day outside. The storms of the past few days have finally cleared off and everything is green and lush. It's hard to believe just how much rain we have received this past spring. It was forecasted that unless we had a wet spring that our water supplies wouldn't last through the summer. Well, our prayers have been answered and we have enough and to spare. The Snake River is running high and there are still snow reserves in the mountains. Although there has been water in the canal for several weeks now, most of us haven't irrigated because of the abundant rain.

The only downside of all this rain is that it has made it difficult to keep up with the yard work. Nate removed the battery from my riding mower and dropped by enroute to Washington on Thursday to put in a new one. It made a huge difference to have the mower start instead of hooking it up to the van and jump starting it each time I needed to mow. The process was complicated by the fact that each time I got off the mower seat, it automatically shut off the mower. I had worked up a pretty elaborate system for using a large cinderblock which I placed on the seat in my stead while I jumped off, removed the jumper cables from both mower and car, and then climbed back on and threw the cinderblock off to the side. I guess I should have gotten a second opinion when Ralph told me that the battery couldn't be replaced and I could have had Gary do the replacement for me but I didn't realize it could be done until Nate made his visit.

SaraKay and I went to the cemetery yesterday in between rain storms and decorated Daddy and Allan and Barbara's graves. There were a lot of other people there and the cemetery was ablaze with color and American flags. I had put flowers on Grandma Gooch's grave Friday enroute to the temple and that cemetery was the same although it is older and there weren't as many flowers. I am so grateful for a day to commemorate our kindred dead and take a moment to recognize their legacy. It is always a poignant experience for me, especially now that Daddy's gone.

(Tuesday) SaraKay attended my meetings with me on Sunday before going to the singles branch. They put in a new presidency and it was an emotional meeting. Following the meeting there was a "Linger Longer" at President Leavitt's so SaraKay didn't arrive home until after six, just as I was getting ready to go to the cemetery with Mike and Marci and their little ones. I had arranged to meet Steve and Bonnie and family at the cemetery at 6:30 and so it was fun to have some of the family meet and visit at the grave site. There were so many flowers; Daddy's grave looked

beautiful. I will try to forward a picture my friend, Renee Hawkley took. She was there looking for some family history info on a distant great grandfather and we helped her with that before we left the cemetery.

Bonnie had arranged a "This Is Your Life" for Steve's 40th birthday (June 18th) and we drove to the farm and took pictures of the house and cellar and farm yard. Next we visited the Rockford house, the Moreland Elementary School, and then on to the Pallet Palace. Steve's kids hadn't seen most of these sites and we spent a while at each one talking about memories. The responses that you siblings sent to Bonnie were read as we made our visits and that proved to be both touching and humorous. Mike, Marci, and girls and SaraKay and I accompanied Steve and Bonnie and their family on this "trip down memory lane" and it made for a fun Sunday evening. Later the Larsen's of Wellsville continued on to Bonnie's folks in Idaho Falls and the rest of us came home and got little ones to bed.

Monday dawned warm and sunny and Mike and Marci and I got some projects in the yard done while SaraKay did homework and Amber, Ellie, and Olivia played in the yard. I so appreciated their help putting my trampoline mat back on, cleaning out the rain gutters and my shed, stowing away my propane tanks, and weeding around some trees. Of course, we also found time to give Amber and Ellie a ride on the riding mower and wheelbarrow and time on the swings and trampoline.

At one point Ellie climbed up on the back rail fence, sat on the second rail while holding on to the top rail, and just sat there looking out into the trees and the pasture. She was singing some song to herself and seemed happy and content with life in general. Amber in the meantime was cleaning off the trampoline mat with some sudsy water and the two of them were pretty content for a long time. Later, Ellie said she wanted to sit on the fence again and sing and it was sweet to see her out there enjoying nature and the solitude. We joked that she had put herself in "Time Out" or just needed to get away and have time to meditate. Whatever the reason, it reminded me of how much I enjoy a warm summer afternoon, sitting in my yard and relishing the sounds of nature. I love this beautiful valley, especially this time of year. I was reminded as we drove out to the farm on Sunday of just how beautiful the farms are and of how peaceful it is. Rachel, who was riding with me, commented on the peacefulness and I agreed that there are few things to compare with the sounds of the rainbirds ticking away in the quiet of the evening when the work is done and night is coming on.

Monday afternoon Mike and Marci took SaraKay and I geocaching. He found the caches (over 100) within the Blackfoot area and we took off in their van to discover some treasures. One lead took us to the Moreland Park where we walked about .2 miles along a hiking path (Mike pushing the stroller) and after a careful and somewhat lengthy search we discovered the cache. It was of interest to us that on the "log" of previous geocachers, were the names of some of our good friends, the Burt Family from the Thomas 1st Ward. It was a fun activity and also gave us a chance to watch the birds at the park as well as giving us a chance to go frog hunting. (I stayed by the car and watched Olivia during that activity.) Anyway, we had a fun and productive day before everyone left about eight for home.

This morning Steve and Bonnie and family arrived and Steve helped me with some computer issues until Kent Fife came for a prearranged visit with Steve on setting up an internet site for selling a product. He knew Steve was knowledgeable about that and wanted to pick his brain. In the meantime, Bonnie and the kids helped me with some other projects including identifying switches in my fuse box in the garage so I know which switch is to which appliance and room. When I had the problems with my stove, I didn't have a list of the different switches and I couldn't very well run in and out of the garage each time I changed a switch. I positioned the kids and Bonnie throughout the house and we figured out and labeled each one. Having the kid's help really made light work of that project.

After a fun visit we had lunch and I sent them on their way. They had a vocal recital, soccer tryouts, and Anne Marie had her first soft ball game of the season this afternoon so they needed to get back asap. All of you children are certainly involved right now. It's such a blessing that we enjoy peace and prosperity enough for these abundant lifestyles.

I got a call a couple of minutes ago from Debbie Ellis. She and Bruce are New Scout leaders in our ward. They needed a small service project and ask if I had anything to do over here that six 11-year-olds could do in an hour. I just happened to have such a project and I agreed to let them come and help me if they would eat some of the cake

and banana crush that I have left over from the weekend. We struck a deal and I'm looking forward to sharing an evening with their troop.

Hopefully each of you have received Laurel's blog about their China trip and upcoming departure schedule. My heart aches for Laurel with all she has to do these next two months, most of it without John, since he will be back and forth from Shanghai. Anyway, she needs our prayers. I have been putting family names on the temple prayer roll each week and I try to limit how many I put on since we are instructed to not make long lists, but once I start it is difficult to draw the line......John and Laurel in China......Tim and SaraKay and their dating.......Jenny and new baby....Sam and mission papers.......The Andersons of Iowa. See what I mean? I even put my own name on so that I can make it through another week! Anyway, know that your names are prayed over each week in the Idaho Falls Temple and the faith of many in this valley is being exercised in your behalf! So, expect miracles

June 8, 2010

I didn't realize until I called Rachel for her birthday that I had missed chat. I had so many Trek details that I was Trekking from 2:00 until almost 9:30 last night. Things are coming together with the three musical numbers and they are going to be beautiful. Last night at rehearsal we put the instruments with the choir number that we are performing next week at the pre-trek fireside and it sounds great. They've asked me to speak at the fireside and I'm at a loss as to which way to go with it. Thank goodness it's only for 10 minutes.

I'm trying to make all the arrangements for my upcoming trip; substitutes for my Primary class, someone to take care of the yard and irrigating, someone to give me rides back and forth from the shuttle, etc. I'm so grateful that the timing on this trip has been perfect since the temple closes the day after I leave and opens two days before I return so I won't have to get substitutes for the temple.

I have been working on getting pictures in my history book and that has been quite a challenge. I've tried to use the pictures that I've got right here but I'm pretty sure that I'm going to have to start requesting pictures from each of you via email and that has me worried since that procedure is a new one for me and I'm sure it's going to take some training before I can get it figured out.

Sometimes in the middle of all this computer stuff I shake my fist at the sky and say, "Why can't I just grow old gracefully instead of sitting here in front of this computer, fighting with it every step of the way?" And then I try to imagine doing what I am doing without the aid of this computer and I repent and move ahead. Really, I cannot imagine life without this technology. Aside from family history benefits, it keeps me so connected at this stage of my life! I love sending out this letter and getting short responses back from many of you. I have done a lot of my contacting for the Trek through email and many of Dad's family keep in touch with me regularly this way. What a boon!

I'm excited for my trip to Michigan. In fact, I'm excited for my summer in general. If all goes as planned, I will be able to have some good quality time with each of you. My thoughts and prayers right now are for Paul and Jenny especially with their expected arrival. Jenny usually has her babies early so I'm expecting a call any time now. I think she is due on the 13th. Thankfully, Paul has some time off for maternity leave and will be able to help out there and then I will arrive on the 19th and help with the transition.

John sent me an email saying that he will stay in Shanghai until the 14th and then come back and they will all leave as a family the last week in July. Laurel said that she has already seen many tender mercies in regards to their move.

SaraKay is in the last half of second semester and continues to enjoy her classes and roommates. I have felt the last few weeks like she is settling in and feeling more confident with the college scene.

David called to let me know that Joseph will be ordained to the Aaronic Priesthood and Islay will be blessed on July 18th. A big day for their family!

P.S. Yesterday I wasn't able to reach Jonie by the normal channels so I found her on Facebook and sent her a birthday message that way. This morning I had a response from her. She is staying in a Ronald McDonald House because she gave birth to a baby boy prematurely and so she is involved in that right now. I didn't realize that she was pregnant but I could tell that she is very discouraged and could use a note of encouragement. I didn't ask too many questions and she didn't offer the particulars of the situation. She is on Facebook under Jonie Johnson if you have a moment to write her.

June 15, 2010

A big congratulations to Paul and Jenny on the arrival of Kathryn (Kate) Larsen! I loved the pics and write up that Jenny sent out over the weekend and am looking forward to lending a hand with the transition and their busy young household.

I had a wonderful week, culminating in the choir performance at the pre-Trek fireside on Sunday evening and the opportunity to talk. I think it was well received. I've included the text of my remarks at Becky's suggestion. It's probably more info than you have time for but as Jenny said, "for purposes of this record."

Leading a choir again was so fun! I was really proud of them and the flute and violin added so much! The other number that we will be performing is equally as beautiful but we will be up in the mountains and it will be a little harder for it to be heard in those wide-open spaces. Hopefully the CD accompaniment will give us a strong lead.

In Jenny's letter she mentioned that her sister Amy's husband was investigating a job opportunity in Midland. I couldn't help thinking what a wonderful turn of events that would be for Paul and Jenny. And what fun the cousins would have. It's just been nice the last few years to know that even though John and Laurel and Paul and Jenny were far away, at least they had each other. We'll keep our fingers crossed that this may work for Amy and Dave.

I'm looking forward to spending several days in Canton with John and Laurel who are really running a marathon right now. John flew in from Shanghai on Monday and they leave this weekend for the McAllister reunion for next week, arriving home on Saturday, hosting me next week and then we all go to a rented beach house on Lake Michigan for the holiday weekend before I return home and John and Laurel return to complete their final packing and preparations for leaving for China.

One added plus of our time at Lake Michigan is that Shauntel and Randy and their family will be meeting us at the beach house and stay the week there. What fun to see their bunch again and to be able to have a mini-Larsen reunion before John and Laurel take off. When they left for China in 2004 Daddy gave John a blessing and promised him that his family would be watched over by those who were on the other side. If I remember right Grandpa Arch had just passed away and so that had special significance for me. Now I should be even more assured since Daddy will have a bird's eye view of China and I'm sure, will be aware of their situation more than ever before.

Just for future reference: I am leaving on the 7:30 shuttle Saturday morning and flying out of Salt Lake at 2:00 that afternoon. I arrive at 10:40 in Detroit where Paul will pick me up. I'll have my phone with me so feel free to call if you need to. I will be going to Canton sometime the week of July 27th, depending on John and Laurel's schedule and then we will all travel to Lake Michigan on July 2nd. The rest of the bunch are staying the week but I will fly home and be here the night of July 6th. Love to all.

Here's the talk: *"My Grandma and Grandpa Richards raised their large family during the Great Depression. They farmed a small parcel of land in West Jordan, Utah and survived those difficult years through their industry and ingenuity, and the help of the Lord. They raised their own fruit and berries, had a large garden, raised livestock for meat, eggs, and milk, wheat for flour and even kept a hive of bees for honey and a start of vinegar.*

Just outside their kitchen door, adjacent to the farm house was an earthen root cellar. The temperature inside was controlled by an opening in the back of the cellar and wooden shelves lined the walls, each section labeled by the months of the year. When bottled goods were put in the cellar they were divided equally among the months so that the family didn't exceed their allotment for that month. There were baskets of apples, bags of potatoes and carrots, and even milk was kept cool and fresh in this cellar. Grandma explained to me that during the Depression money was scarce, so they produced and stored what they could raise and this was the way they survived financially during that challenging time.

When we would visit, I loved going with Grandma and descending the wooden steps into the root cellar. I loved the smell of the apples and the potatoes and somehow standing in that cool darkness as a little girl, I could almost imagine those bygone days. Grandma Richards always had a story for me on those occasions. I'd like to share one with you tonight.

One day my Grandmother took a bucket of food scraps out to the pig pen and discovered with alarm that the sow who was due to have her litter of piglets any day had broken through the boards

of the pigpen and was gone. It was relatively easy for Grandma to follow the tracks of the sow as she wandered out of the farm yard and into an adjoining acreage covered in sagebrush. Soon Grandma heard the sounds of the newborn piglets and found them beneath a sagebrush on the sun-warmed earth. But the sow was nowhere in sight.

Clara knelt down and carefully placed the piglets in her large apron. Then she stood, holding the corners of her apron, and started back for the farm house. She had not gone far when she heard behind her the unmistakable sound of a very upset sow. Past experience had taught her caution and she turned to face her aggressor, letting the corners of her apron drop and the piglets spill onto the ground. In that split second she spied a old piece of wood nearby on the ground and she quickly picked it up and faced the angry animal. She said the sow charged at her repeatedly but each time Grandma would hit her with the piece of wood and fend her off. After a few such blows, the sow backed away and Grandma Clara, badly shaken but unharmed, returned to the farm yard for help.

My Grandmother is gone now but my heart often turns to her with a deep sense of wonder and gratitude for the life she lived and for all her sacrifices that I could be born in the Covenant and have the gospel in my life today. I know that I honor her best by being courageous and obedient to the gospel and by doing my part to carry on her righteous legacy.

You have been invited to participate in a unique and wonderful adventure, the Blackfoot Northwest Stake's Trek of 2010. You have also been invited to do a little research on one of your ancestors and figuratively take them along with you on this adventure. Your leaders want you to "turn your heart" to your ancestors during this experience and come to know and love them better by walking in their footsteps.

This past week, in preparation for this assignment I have been walking in my Grandmother's footsteps and I have felt her near and thought in my mind I have felt her say, "Thank you, Susan, for recognizing my sacrifices in your behalf."

On my first Trek over 10 years ago Patriarch Evans promised each of us that we would look back on that experience as one of the most significant of our lives. As the years have passed, I have seen that promise fulfilled in my life and even today my memories of both previous Treks are poignant and sweet.

If you are uncertain about the Trek and wondering if you should go or if you have some personal reasons for your hesitation or just don't want to venture out of your comfort zone, talk to your parents or your leaders and let them help you work through your concerns. If needed, request a father's blessing but move ahead with faith. Get yourself and your gear ready and let a spirit of preparation fill you with joyful anticipation! Expect a rich and rewarding experience and you will not be disappointed!

You see, there is something sacred about going into the "wilderness." Just ask Father Lehi or Moses and the children of Israel. Even the Savior found strength for his life's work in a wilderness, away from the crowds and pressures of the day where He could be tutored and tested.

When you go on this Trek, when you willingly put aside the world and its distractions, when you don the clothes of yesteryear, and when you "turn your heart to your fathers" and walk in the footsteps of those who have gone before, you are inviting the Spirit to touch you and to teach you and you will be strengthened in your resolve and testimony of the restoration of the gospel.

Then in the coming years when you are called to trek through the challenges and trials of your life, Remember the Trek of 2010! Remember that you can do tough things. Remember that you have flowing in your veins not only the blood of faithful pioneers but the pure blood of Israel. And knowing that; you will also know that you can be strong and meet successfully whatever challenges that come. Remember also, on those occasions, that you can "turn your heart" to your Heavenly Father and He will hear your prayers, work His miracles in your life, and see you safely through.

June 23, 2010

I'm here with Paul and Jenny and enjoying getting reacquainted with their new baby as well as the rest of the bunch. Everyone is growing up and getting more independent. It's a busy household but Paul and Jenny are a great team and do well with all the demands on their time. Jenny certainly is a trooper when it comes to recovery after a new baby. I've done a little bit of everything from working in the garden to helping with laundry. Of course, my favorite thing is playing with the kids and holding the new baby but

I try to help out with other things, too. I've always said that my idea of heaven is to be able to rock a baby to sleep without interruptions or other things demanding my time.

Michigan is so green and lush this time of year. We've had overcast skies and some rain but it's been mixed with some sunshine so that makes it very pleasant. Their ward was sweet and people have been very considerate of them, becoming their second family. Jenny's sister and family are still trying to decide whether to come here to work or not but I know that many of the ward family are very close and supportive of them and that's always reassuring to see. Beth, Ben, Sophie and Daniel love playing outside and have some nice neighborhood children right next door so that has been good for both families. I am enjoying my stay and grateful for the chance to be here and share in their lives.

June 28, 2010

Today I'm sitting in John and Laurel's study typing this on their computer. I'm beginning to feel like a vagabond, but enjoying the change of pace and the chance to see the Midwestern branches of our family. After a whirlwind week with Paul and Jenny which included gardening, swinging Daniel, helping organize a few draws and closets, swinging Daniel, helping with Kate, and swinging Daniel I decided that all it takes to keep up with a new baby and a two-year-old and three others is two able bodied women working 24/7! I do forget just how busy and crazy it can be with so many small children. Thank goodness Beth is good help, Ben and Sophie are becoming more independent, Paul and Jenny are capable and dedicated, little Daniel is of a sweet temperament, and the new baby is contented.

Jenny and I took the kids and visited a wonderful wooded area called Whiting Forest. It was such a beautiful example of the woods and forests of the area and I thoroughly enjoyed the excursion. I did tell Jenny later that she and Paul have their own "woods and forests" playground in their backyard. One side of their large yard is a barrier of various bushes and trees and the children and their neighborhood friends had all sorts of adventures making forts and playing other creative games in that area. There were lots of birds and rabbits and their large deck is also a perfect place for lots of summer fun.

The new baby, Kate, took on a look of her own while I was there and a couple of times Beth and I nearly got a smile out of her. Of course, doing all the antics we were doing, we would have gotten a smile out of anyone!

On Saturday Paul and the oldest four took me to meet John halfway to Canton and we made the swap. I must admit I felt a little sad to leave Paul and Jenny. They have so much on their plates with babies, church work, career, home improvement projects, and a huge garden that I wished I lived closer and could lend a hand on a regular basis. But they are troopers and enjoying their good life among sweet neighbors and a supportive bunch of ward friends.

When I arrived at John and Laurel's it was obvious that they have been heavily involved in their own drama of getting ready for their upcoming move. The house looks a little empty with some of the furnishings gone (Craig's list) and packing piles throughout the house. It's all I can do to see them making all of these tough decisions in preparation for their trip to China. I'm trying to be brave and supportive but I can't even fathom liquidating almost all that you own and leaving for a foreign country. They are all in good spirits and saying their good-byes to all their associates and ward members and severing the ties that have bound them to this area now for the last four years. Sunday John was released from the bishopric and Laurel was supposed to have taught her last YW lesson but on Saturday night we received a phone call from the bishop saying that there had been an electrical fire in the building and there would be no YW, Primary, Sunday School or Relief Society and that the ward would meet in the gym for sacrament meeting. I felt badly that Laurel didn't get to teach one last time but the family will have another Sunday here before leaving so she was okay with it. The kids are taking all this in their stride. They have learned that the international school they will be attending will be K-12 and have about 600 students. It offers strings, band, tennis, and a host of wonderful opportunities. Tonight, a Chinese teacher is arriving to start the children on Chinese lessons, courtesy of Ford Motor so I will sit in on that. They have been working with an interactive computer program on an individual basis and that has been a fun way to be introduced to the language, too.

I am reminded that each of you children live in a very different world than I do and I'm trying to be flexible and go with the flow. Who knows where your lives will take you? The wonderful thing is that as I visit each of you, I feel a great sense of gratitude that each of you are trying to live the

gospel and bring up your families in righteousness.

This weekend we will leave and spend the Fourth at a beach house on Lake Michigan. Shauntel and Randy and bunch will join us as well as Paul and Jenny and family. It should be a wonderful time together. I think SaraKay is going to spend the holiday with Mike and Marci and Tim has been invited to join them, too, but was uncertain of his plans. He has been really involved the last few weeks with various projects and feels like he needs some time to catch up.

July 11, 2010

I've got a few minutes before I need to leave for a funeral and thought I would get this letter out before I got too far into my day. The funeral is for Jose and Jill Loera's little boy who was in a four-wheeler accident on July 4th and killed. Jose was driving and he was badly injured but the other child was thrown free and uninjured. It's a tough pill to swallow for their young family.

It's been harried since arriving home on Tuesday evening but it feels good to be home and able to take care of my obligations here. My trip to the Midwest was bittersweet. Spending time with Paul and Jenny, John and Laurel, and Shauntel and Randy was a joy, but leaving them behind once my vacation was over was painful.

As I mentioned in last week's letter, I arrived at John and Laurels on Saturday and spent the following week with them prior to going to the cabin at Lake Michigan. When I first got to their home and saw the signs all around me of their upcoming departure, I felt a great sense of loss. Although they have been to China before, this time it's harder for me to let them go. That really doesn't make much sense since their situation will be so much more favorable than it was before. I think the thought of the distances involved makes it daunting.

Since I was the designated babysitter for much of the week, I was the one to answer the front door, greet the buyers, and help remove the furnishings that had been sold on Craig's List. At first, I wanted to just tell the people, "Sorry, no thanks!" but of course, I didn't. When I finally identified my feelings, I realized that although their house was being disassembled, their home was still intact. I was getting the two confused. As the week went on and the details of their upcoming job, activities, and school were talked about I felt myself calm down and I determined to not say anything negative since Laurel and the kids were all being so accepting and excited about this adventure.

On Monday night when John drove me home to catch my flight, I listened in on a conference call John took from his Chinese and Brazilian connections. It was an eye opener to listen to him confer, supervise, and direct. I realized that he had come a long way since his years running a lawn mowing business. Maybe in a mother's eyes, her children will always be children. Anyway, after listening in on that session, I recognized that John and China may be forever linked and I've got to get on board and rejoice in this opportunity.

Let me mention a few of the myriad details Laurel and John were grappling with: disposing of all their possessions except the ones that would fit in their cargo crate; dental, medical, eye exams, passports and visas, Tessa's medications, home sale, yard care, severing Church assignments, flight and hotel accommodations for both Canton and Shanghai, dance studio and Zumba connections terminated, food accumulation of items not available in China, and return of cars prior to departure. The list goes on and on. Becky and Chet can certainly identify with all of this but it was overwhelming to me.

When Saturday arrived and we packed for the Lake Michigan trip I felt like it was so hard for them to pull away with everything pressing on them but they did and the time with Paul and Jenny and Shauntel and Randy and their families was a wonderful break from all the pressures of the previous months. I so appreciated being able to be with them for that week and not only assist in some small way but have my worries allayed, too.

My time at the cabin and beach was wonderful. Jenny said it best when she described Lake Michigan as "awe-inspiring." It truly was! The lake is so large that it gives the appearance of the ocean with the waves coming ashore in never-ending motion. The beach was of beautiful, soft, fine sand and the children could wade out into the lake for a long way because the slope to deeper water was so gradual. It made for a wonderful place for our group with little fear of someone getting carried away with the waves. We spent the entire day Monday on the beach and visited, swam in the surf, played in the sand, and had a great time!

I even ventured out into the surf and learned a few lessons about riding the waves. One time I turned my back on the incoming waves and one

hit me so hard that I lost my balance and ended up with my face and hair drenched. Beth, who had been riding the waves longer than I had, gave me some good counsel. "Grandma, just ride them, don't fight it, and you'll enjoy the ride!" That sounded like advice for more than a day at the beach. Of course, there was other symbolism of that experience that could hardly be ignored: "The wise man built his house upon a rock" being the first that comes readily to mind. I guess others were about the mighty power of nature, the loving kindness of a God who has provided us with this beautiful world and surroundings that inspire, and of the inevitability of life moving forward, one wave after another. Paul spoke of it later and commented that if we compared the waves to the challenges that confront us, we get past one wave or challenge and others come in quick succession. He also commented that if we didn't have the waves beating against us, our experience would be like standing in still water. Now what would be the fun (or growth) in that!

Anyway, my time in Michigan was sweet and my trip home uneventful (just the way I like it). I did have a few minutes of anxiety when I thought I was going to miss my connection in Houston. Upon mentioning this to my seatmate on the plane, he explained that I had crossed time zones and that we would be in Houston in plenty of time to catch our flight into SLC. (Whew!)

On Friday morning I was up early getting the pasture irrigated when I received a phone call from Karen and Jim saying that they were parked with their trailer across the street in the church parking lot and wondered if they could drop by for a few minutes before continuing on to the Jackson Hole area. I was delighted. Fortunately, I was pretty much ready for the temple and so I was able to have a couple of hours with them before they left for parts north. What a treat! Just for everyone's information: Teresa is still working in the Washington D.C. area and loving it! Jacob returns from his mission on August 30th and he and Josh, who graduated in June, will be roommates at USU. What a great experience for them. Karen and Jim are nearing the empty nest stage and Karen has taken employment at Hill Airforce Base where Jim works so she is going to be starting that job soon. I know how emotional it is when you send off your last so I could empathize when Karen was a bit weepy. Also, Grandma Barbara's birthday was the 10th and I'm sure that some of Karen's tenderness was because of that. We never really get over the loss of those near and dear to us. We just recognize that there will always be those poignant feelings and allow ourselves the luxury of shedding a few tears and recalling them with sweetness. Thanks, Karen and Jim, for taking some time with me.

Let me also mention that Bethany will be getting married on August 21st in Salt Lake City so if any of you siblings would like to attend that, I'll keep in touch and we can make arrangements as it gets closer. I'm excited to get to see the Larsens. They are all so dear to me.

Since arriving home, I have been doing yard work, putting in my shift at the temple, cooking for the weekend company, cleaning for the weekend, and trying to get my last Trek practices set up and arranged. This next week will be a big one but I'm excited to host the Seely's for the week and to have Mike and Marci here for the weekend. I spent Friday night after my temple shift in Rexburg with SaraKay for her birthday. I can't believe that she is really 20! How time flies when you are having (or not having) fun! I am so grateful for SaraKay and the blessing that she has been in my life. But I feel that way about each and every one of you. My life is rich and full because of your love and goodness and my challenges lessened because I feel of your loving support.

July 19, 2010

In his talk at Dad's funeral, President Carmack mentioned that Daddy would continue to be supportive and aware of us and that in our hour of need we would feel his influence and love. I think those words have been realized many times in our lives over the past months as we have faced difficult challenges and situations. I have also felt that in the "best of times" and "worst of times" the Spirit has prepared, strengthened, and comforted us. I recognize the many tender mercies we have received.

This past week Becky and the kids have been here for a visit. We scheduled this summer visit many months ago not realizing at the time that it would be such a crucial time for Becky and her family. Just a few days before she arrived here Chet asked her for a divorce. He has been distancing himself from the Church for the last several years and although Becky and our family continued to hope and pray that his heart would be softened, it wasn't to be.

When Becky and the kids flew to Michigan in January to spend some time with family there, she

had a chance to visit with John and Laurel about her concerns. Laurel suggested that John give her a blessing and she was so grateful for that. Later she told me that all during her visit she kept thinking about how much John reminded her of Daddy and that as he placed his hands upon her head, she felt that he truly was acting in Daddy's stead. John gave her beautiful counsel and distinct promises in the blessing that have strengthened her so that as circumstances developed these past weeks, she has been able to find peace.

When Becky arrived on Sunday afternoon, we talked things through and throughout the week she was able to visit in person or by phone with each of her siblings. Although her news was heart-breaking, she appreciated the comfort and counsel she received from them. She asked that I let the extended family know what was going on and request your faith and prayers for her and Chet and their children in the months ahead as they make the decisions that need to be made.

Some of you have asked what you could do to show support. I think at this point she needs her time and energy focused on her family and so be aware of that. A short email message would give support but let her take the lead as far as phone calls since the next few weeks are going to be busy ones.

Chet flew in on Friday. Becky was in charge of her class reunion on Saturday and they had lots of details and responsibilities in regards to that but we had time to talk things through. I appreciated Chet's visit. I know it wasn't easy for either of us but we have had 13 years of love and respect for each other and I needed the time with him to reaffirm to me that this course of action was necessary. By the time they left last night I felt a spirit of peace with what is happening and confident that the Lord will help Becky see things clearly and cope successfully although there are many challenges ahead.

Thank you for your love and continuing support. I have seen many tender mercies as we have started into this transition and I know that we will see many more.

July 27, 2010

I just got back from attending the funeral for Gordon Parsons, a fellow who Daddy and I activated during our time as ward missionaries. He has had continuing health problems and died last week of a heart attack. I was grateful that I could go and show support. His sister, Donna Jess, is also in our ward and Daddy and I went with them to the temple the first time they went back after many years of inactivity. It was a beautiful funeral and made more so by the music of Sue Johnson and her daughters, Brittany Brugger and Melissa, who were visiting for a few days and offered to provide music for the services. The high priest quorum was very supportive and I couldn't help thinking how wonderful that both Gordon and Donna have come back after many years away.

Last week was somewhat of a blur. I substituted at the temple on Tuesday and then had my regular shift on Friday. It was fun on Friday because Gary and Linda were substituting on my shift and I got a chance to visit with them throughout the day. On Thursday night I took the van to Rexburg to help SaraKay move some of her big items. She finished up finals on Friday and drove home Saturday morning with the rest of her stuff. She will have about a five-week break and then she will be headed back for fall semester. Fortunately, Kesler's was willing to hire her for that short time and she is at work this morning. She's grateful for a break from the pressures of school.

We left on Saturday about 1:00 for Boise. Dave and Andrea invited us to join them for Joseph's ordination and Islay's blessing. We had a pleasant trip. I was grateful for a traveling companion although SaraKay was so tired from the previous final's week that she slept most of the way. Andrea's mother, Laurel, had arrived on Friday and it was so nice to renew my friendship with her.

When we arrived Laurel and Anna Sue were just returning from a Boise State EFY conference, and David was returning from floating the rapids with some work associates, including the men from Singapore who David deals with in his job at HP. At one point in the river rafting everyone on one side of the raft got bounced out and those on the opposite side followed suit. David hit his knee on a bunch of rocks. It was red and swollen by the time he got home and he applied ice to try to keep the swelling down. (Despite the pain he commented that it was a great trip and certainly worth the discomfort!)

After a delicious meal of pizza and salad Tim took SaraKay, Joseph, Chantelle, and McKay to the tennis court and gave them some tennis pointers. I watched him work with the kids and help them develop their skills. He is a great

teacher! Later we helped David figure out how to install a new seat in his suburban for a family trip they are taking to the Oregon Coast this next week. It's kind of their last hurrah of the season and it sounded like they had lots of fun things planned.

On Sunday Tim met us at the church at 11:00 for Joseph's ordination. Joseph looked so handsome and passed the sacrament during their 11:30 sacrament meeting. Before the meeting started, I watched as the priests oriented him as to the how of his newest assignment. The meeting was a missionary homecoming and there was such a crowd that Joseph had to go back to the table twice for another tray of bread and once for more water. We were seated close to the front and were all watching how well Joseph was handling his first time passing the sacrament. When it was over, I felt like our whole row was beaming with pride and wanted to stand up and give him high fives as he returned to sit with us.

Dave and Andrea's family performed a musical number in sacrament meeting and invited SaraKay to join with them. Laurel played a creative accompaniment of "Little Pioneer Children" and "Come, Come, Ye Saints" and Anna Sue accompanied one verse with a Scottish penny whistle. It was beautiful and so appropriate for commemorating Pioneer Day. Islay was blessed and looked beautiful in her white blessing dress and matching headband. She reminds me so much of Laurel and Chantelle and is a wide-eyed and beautiful little girl. Since she is nearly six months old, it was a challenge trying to keep her on the hands of the men in the circle during the blessing. David had one hand under Islay and one on the shoulder of the next person in the circle. Part way through the blessing Islay decided to start moving around and Tim, sensing the problem kept his eyes open and quickly caught Islay as she began slipping off the men's hands. David, continuing to give the blessing, felt her slipping, but then felt her become stabilized and didn't realize until later that Tim had come to the rescue. He admitted that it was pretty disconcerting to be trying to feel the Spirit, give the blessing, and keep one busy little baby content and safe.

That afternoon we played games, had a talent show, and enjoyed a delicious meal before driving home. We so appreciated the chance to be with David and Andrea and their family and Tim. Everyone is growing up and their lives are busy and rewarding. This next year will be Laurel's senior year and then their nest will start to empty. Everyone seemed excited for the upcoming year but grateful for a few more weeks of summer fun.

I got a chance to visit with Tim for a while and appreciated that. His life as a landlord has its ups and downs as well as all the pressures at work. This next week is a big one for Scentsy as they are having a national convention and following that Tim is hoping for an opportunity to address some of the issues at work that are frustrating him. He continues to date but hasn't had that "one and only" come into his life. It was so nice for me to have some one-on-one time with him and to have his support at Sunday's special occasions.

Becky continues to see many tender mercies as she navigates through the decisions before her. The kids started school today and that will free up some time. Her ward has been wonderful and supportive. She is optimistic and in good spirits. Thank you for your prayers.

Marci and little ones will be here Wednesday and Thursday while Mike goes on a high adventure trip with his YM in the ward. She is a trooper about supporting him and it's always fun to have her come and visit. Paul and Jenny will be here the second weekend in August and I'd love to have any of you come who would like to join us. Jenny is going to be visiting her family in Bountiful for a couple of weeks before Paul flies in and that should be fun for all of them. Shauntel and Randy have a possible buyer for their Smithfield home but it hasn't been tied down yet so they continue to negotiate and pray that it will work out. Of course, this would be wonderful news for them. I am planning to fly to Iowa for Archie's baptism in October so I'm happy for that opportunity to spend some time with them.

August 1, 2010

I just can't believe that August has arrived! I think part of the reason it doesn't seem like we've had a full summer is because we had such a long, wet, cold spring. In fact, I think I could count on one hand the number of really hot days we've had.

FYI: The Larsens are having some special events coming up and I'm passing on the invitation from both Rick and Terry and Jeanie and Scot to all the cousins. On August 21st Bethany will be married to Cameron Jacobs. I got their invitation yesterday and they are such a beautiful couple! Staff and Kaye have offered their home in Lehi for the

festivities and I'm sure it will be a wonderful occasion.

On September 4th Jonathan is marrying Amber Gunn and they are hosting a reception that evening at Amber's home in Pocatello. I'm excited to get to see their extended family. It's been years since I've seen Jacob and his wife and their little ones. Hopefully they will be flying in from Florida for the wedding. Life is so hectic and full that there hardly seems time for extended family so I'm grateful for occasions that bring us together. Elder Jacob VanFleet will be returning from his mission the end of August and is registered at USU for fall semester. I think they are having his homecoming the last Sunday in August.

Sam will be going through the Logan Temple for his own endowment on the 5:30 session on Saturday, August 21st. I felt badly when I realized that this is the day Bethany is getting married. Steph and I tried for several days to come up with an alternate plan but when everyone's schedules were considered it just had to be that day. Sam is anxious to get gone on his mission and Steph just completed one of her last college courses in conjunction with her teaching job. She starts back into school on the 11th. Harried summer!

Shauntel and Randy have also had a busy summer. Their Smithfield home sale is still up in the air but they have decided they can live with whatever happens and just have to wait it out. Archie will turn the big "eight" in September and I'll be flying out in October to spend some time with them around his baptismal date.

Stephen and Bonnie have had a marathon of a summer with jobs for Rachel and Nate as well as Trek, Scout Camp, Girls' Camp, volunteering at the Pioneer Village, and other involvements. All good stuff!

David and Andrea and Andrea's mother, Laurel, and family are spending the week on the Oregon coast. School is on the horizon and all the commitments that that brings. I'm glad they are getting in some good family time together.

Becky's recent email chronicled the kids' first week of school and their busy household. If I remember right from my days of "mothering" those first few days are usually pretty stressful but hopefully everyone will settle in and enjoy the upcoming year. Becky is working through the decisions she is facing and certainly has wonderful support from her extended family, Arizona ward, and personal friends.

John and Laurel must have arrived safely in Shanghai because I got the emails from Emma and James regarding their hotel, driver, and new branch. Hopefully everyone will get over their jet lag, get enrolled this week in school, and start to enjoy China! I look forward to their "Journey to the East" blog (complete with pictures) and their adventures.

Mike just returned from a Teacher/Priest super activity that included hiking Table Rock, water skiing at Palisades, and white-water rafting on the Snake! When he called here enroute home he sounded really tired. Marci and girls arrived Wednesday and we thoroughly enjoyed having them here for a few days while Mike was gone.

Paul and Jenny blessed Kate today and Paul said it was very special. Jenny's mom flew in from SLC at four this morning and Jenny, Beth, and Kate, who had been staying at a nearby motel, picked her up at the airport and drove her to Midland for their meetings and the blessing. I'm sure they were a tired bunch but Paul said it was a wonderful day! Jenny and Mom will be flying out Wednesday night for SLC with the children and Paul will follow in a week. I'll be hosting them on Friday-Monday, August 13-16. Love to have anyone come who wants to join us.

Tim and his Scentsy Co. moved into a beautiful new building last week. It's been a great opportunity for him to have a position in this small company and to watch it grow and adjust to the ever-changing market. He spent yesterday waterskiing and wakeboarding with his close friend, Andy Coats, and even learned how to catch some air with the board! Fun weekend!

SaraKay is off somewhere tonight with the YSA's. She has so many sweet friends in this community and loves to come home for a while and hang out with them. Last night when she got home about 10:30 from work she said, "Well, I'm ready to go back to college. Running a cash register all day is truly mind numbing!" Good motivation for a college degree. I'm enjoying having her around for a while and the only problem we are having is staying up way too late every night talking!

I'm keeping busy and enjoying my yard on these long summer evenings. My time on Friday at the temple is such a highlight in my week. Last Friday night I attended our ward party and had a great time visiting. Several of our past missionary contacts were there and I loved catching up on them and their activities. I have a great group of

friends here and feel of their love and support. We've had a couple of new families move into our ward and we've added nine new children to our rosters. In the last two years we've had four sets of twins born or move into our ward. It was noisy today during our sacrament meeting and I was thinking of the words to the song, "In our lovely Deseret, where the saints of God have met, there's a multitude of children all around." How sweet!

SaraKay and I may be driving to Burley tomorrow for a dental appointment with Dr. Mike. Sure appreciate his loving care and generosity in helping SaraKay since we lost her dental insurance when Daddy died.

August 8, 2010

I've had a sweet Sabbath and am home alone tonight. SaraKay is at a YSA activity; we scheduled out our week before she left. The countdown in on to Zac's arrival home. She is trying to not get too excited but it's still pretty amazing that he will be arriving home on the 19th of this month. SaraKay will be accompanying him on his viola for his report on August 22nd and then he will be leaving for Provo and starting school there. She's got some friends in Provo who have invited her to come for a weekend and go to a football game this fall so she's hoping that will work for her and that she'll get to see Zac while she's there. We're not counting on anything but they've been great friends for a long time.

I've been following BYU preseason news and was happy to see that Boise has joined us in the Mountain West Conference. I know there's been a lot of emotion surrounding the departure of the Utes so I think having Boise on board will help.

I've had a bittersweet week. On Tuesday morning I was walking at the church with Sharen Moss. Tuesday night SaraKay was having a big party here with a lot of her YSA friends when I got a call informing me that Sharen's husband had been found dead, floating in the Blackfoot Reservoir. What a shock! I immediately went to make a visit. Already the family was gathering and I offered my home if any of the children's families needed a place to stay for the funeral. She said that between the kid's in-laws and Jim's family they thought they had places for everyone. (An autopsy revealed that he had probably lost his footing on some wet rocks along the banks of the reservoir, hit his head, and toppled into the reservoir, to be found by someone later.)

That night Nate, who is helping Chad with a church remodel in Shelley, called and said that he had been visiting with Mom's dear friend, Janeal Swanson, and he found out that she hadn't been back to the temple for six years although she holds a current recommend. She fell six years ago and messed up her ankle and just hadn't gotten around to going again. Nate called to see if I would like to go with them and I agreed so Wednesday night we went together. To say that it was sweet is an understatement. It was just wonderful to be in the temple with my brother and one of Mom's dear friends. I felt so emotional throughout the session and as we embraced in the Celestial room I would not have been surprised to see Mom there, smiling. What a thrill!

On Thursday Nate came for supper and a visit and to bring me some dress pants that he needed hemmed. I was glad he had an excuse to come since he works such long hours that I don't normally get to see much of him. It's been a treat to have him living closer for a few months.

Friday was my temple day and it was peaceful and renewing, as usual. Karen had called earlier in the week and asked about staying the night with me on Friday since she had a class reunion on Saturday. After a little bit of phoning and planning we arranged it and she arrived Friday night. We spent several hours going over family history information and talking through plans to get Barbara and Allan's life stories published. We went through three boxes of memorabilia and had a wonderful trip down memory lane. Karen is in the process of typing up all the Larsen family letters '78-90 and we want to include those in whatever project we do. Of course, with all of Allan's involvement in the political arena for so many years, it is just overwhelming to go through all the Legislative logs and newspaper clippings that have been preserved and even try to imagine sorting it out and getting it into a book. By the time we were through (midnight) we both were feeling pretty overwhelmed.

On Saturday morning SaraKay and I both got in a good visit with Karen before she left for her reunion. I left to help with the funeral and luncheon and SaraKay had work. Later that day Nate called and dropped by to pick up some things that he left when he came to dinner on Thursday. Karen arrived and we visited over a late lunch. Both of them left about four and later I got a call from Brad and Carolee Cheney who were in the area to attend the reception of SaraKay's

roommate, Carly Anderson. They had another roommate with them (they are all in a dinner club together at BYU-I) and they dropped by to visit enroute to that reception. When SaraKay got off work she quickly changed and then went to the reception before attending a rehearsal for a musical number she was helping with in sacrament meeting today. It was midnight before she got home and I was still awake when she arrived. All of this late-night stuff is killing me! Today I took a two-hour nap and felt like I could have slept right through to Monday.

August 18, 2010

I just received an email from Jenny letting me know that they had arrived safely home at 2:30 this morning! She said the kids got along great and the flights went smoothly. What a relief after the craziness of their flight to SLC two weeks ago when they were pulled aside at security and all of them (Jenny, her mother, Beth, Ben, Sophie, Daniel, and Kate) were "patted down" since the stroller they were pushing tested positive for explosives. It's a little hard to envision that group looking like a threat to national security! Anyway, it was a relief to know that they are safely home and all is well.

Having Paul and Jenny here was such a treat! Beth, Ben, and Sophie are really growing up and it's a pleasure to interact with them and see them maturing. It took a while for Daniel to accept me again but with time he did and baby Kate is really coming into her own. It's a busy bunch to be sure!

Saturday afternoon we were sitting in the back yard when Staff and Kaye dropped in for a visit. Staff was in town for his class reunion. It was so nice to sit and visit for a while with them. They are doing well and busy being grandparents to their 28 grandchildren! They related to us that both of them had recently broken a toe and had received treatment for it although Staff's injury was more recent and he was wearing a black boot until the toe healed.

It was fun to take Paul and Jenny and family with me to Church on Sunday. I was in Primary with Beth and Ben and had Sophie in my Sunbeam class. It's always fun for me to "show off" my family and fun for the ward to get reacquainted with you kids when you come home for a visit.

It was an added treat to have Mike and Marci join us on Sunday for dinner and visiting. The cousins quickly bonded and we all enjoyed the warm summer evening and the chance to be together. Mike and Marci had just returned from Marci's family reunion so they had had a busy weekend.

On Monday Paul offered to help with some projects around the house and yard and ended up replacing my downstairs bathroom faucet, trimmed some bushes and trimmed back the large tree on the front corner of the house. He also sharpened the blades on my riding mower. SaraKay, Jenny, and the kids washed all the cars.

Paul also took my bathtub drain apart and solved a drainage problem that has been an issue for years. When he picked up a new faucet at Standard Plumbing, the clerk recommended a crystal compound and after three applications Paul was able to get water draining freely. I was pretty amazed at Paul's expertise. I guess he's developed a lot of skills while remodeling their Midland home. I told him that he saved me big bucks!

Monday night SaraKay left for work about six and Paul and Jenny weren't far behind. They were driving to Bountiful to spend the night with her parents and then were flying out on Tuesday afternoon. After everyone left, I sat down in the family room and thought how lonely it felt. It put me in mind of something Shauntel once said about how homesick she would get after we had visited her in Iowa. She said that she had learned to not think about how far removed she was from family and then she got along okay. That's what I need to do. I get along pretty well if I just keep working and don't let myself think about how far away each of you are.

This weekend Sam is going through the temple for his own endowment and I'm excited to be with the Bennions for that special occasion. It doesn't seem possible that I have a grandchild old enough to be serving a mission! Time really does fly: a testimony of the importance of living each day with goodness and gladness. Just a reminder that Sam's farewell is September 19th. Steph will send out the details soon. She started into her new school year just a week ago so I'm sure she's feeling a little overwhelmed right now.

When I walked this morning with Janet, we saw several school buses on their routes and it filled me with nostalgia thinking back of the many years we had kids riding the bus or taking the green Toyota. My life is changing and I'm definitely out of the mainstream around here. But, that's not all

bad. I keep reminding myself that I have time for other projects that are age-appropriate for me. Our lives are certainly full of transitions and I guess it is important to face forward and anticipate the good times ahead!

August 23, 2010

The weekend is over and the dust has settled. It seems like last week was a whirlwind with all the "comings and goings" and commitments. SaraKay has been trying to find time to go to Burley for her dental exam but between reunions and her work schedule it began to look like she wasn't going to be able to fit it in. Mike is leaving this weekend for his humanitarian mission to the Amazon and won't be back until after SaraKay starts back into school in September so we were almost in panic mode trying to find a few hours when it would work. We had to do it "after hours" on Mike's own time. Finally, we decided to make a trip Thursday night after SaraKay got off of work. We met Mike (who had been working in the ward's fair booth that evening) at the clinic at nine and got it taken care of. We spent that night with them and left early Friday morning so that I could be home for my temple assignment by 9:30. We really appreciate Mike doing this for SaraKay and for Marci hosting us that night.

Thursday night SaraKay's friend, Zac Hansen, arrived home from his mission to Guatemala. Friday they rehearsed a viola number for his homecoming. Another friend, Kortney Murdock, asked SaraKay to perform with a quartet for her homecoming so between work shifts, SaraKay was in rehearsals.

Saturday morning SaraKay was in the shower and when she went to turn off the hot water, it wouldn't turn off. It was the same tap that I had hired a plumber to fix several weeks ago. When Paul was here we removed the knob so we could clean it so I knew how to get into the handle mechanism. I worked on it with the pliers, turning it this way and that but to no avail. So, in desperation I turned off the main water line to the house and tried to locate a plumber. My regular plumber wasn't home so I called Bruce Bigler in Blackfoot who had helped Dad and I on the home we remodeled. He was retired but he talked the situation over with me and eventually came out to the house to make sure that I could get by until this morning when his son could make a service call. Since we have two water heaters, the kitchen area was unaffected and SaraKay and I used the hot water there and did the best we could for the weekend.

I appreciated Bruce's help and was relieved that I could leave for Utah and not be worrying about it. I left about 2:00 for Logan and arrived at Steph and Linds' at four just as Sam and Linds were getting ready to leave for the temple. Stephani, Linds' brother, Chris, and I left at 4:30 and met Doug and Naomi (Linds' parents) and Steve in the temple waiting room before going into the own endowment session. It was a relatively small session and we sat close to the front of the endowment room. It was an added treat to get to go through a session in that temple since I've never done that before. I was there for Drake's sealing and for Ashley's wedding, but not for an endowment session.

Every time I go through the temple with a person getting their own endowments, I remember my first experience with temple worship. It was in the Idaho Falls Temple the day I married Daddy. My mother had talked to me about the temple ceremony but the whole experience was quite a departure from our normal Sunday worship services. Mother told me to just relax and enjoy the session and then to return often to gain understanding. I recall the washings and anointings and marveling at the beautiful promises. Anyway, I was thinking about Sam and how this new experience would be for him when Stephani mentioned that he had taken a temple preparation class and she felt like that had really helped him understand the significance of what would take place.

Since we were sitting so close to the front I was one of the first ones through the veil. It was a tearful reunion in that beautiful Celestial room when all of our party emerged from the veil area and embraced. Of course, on these occasions, I always wonder if Daddy is privileged to pull away from his assignments elsewhere in the universe and join us for a couple of hours. It's impossible to know just what his role is in regards to his posterity but it's a sweet thought that perhaps he is present for these momentous events.

Following the session, Linds took us out to dinner at Olive Garden. Bonnie and Josh both joined us for that. Bonnie had just returned from spending a few days with her parents in Idaho Falls since her dad was recovering from surgery. Although the device Bonnie uses for pain control is effective, sitting for long periods of time, like

several hours in a car, really puts a strain on her and so she wasn't able to make the session.

Sunday morning, I got up early to leave for home and make it back in time for the two missionary meetings. Linds and Steph awoke before I left and offered me a bunch of produce from their prolific garden. They have a huge garden area complete with an amazing raspberry patch, rock walk ways, and an abundance of all kinds of produce. I don't know how they keep up with it! Anyway, before I left, I had enough produce in the trunk to last me for several weeks.

I arrived home just as SaraKay was ready to leave for a rehearsal and I quickly put together a salad for Zac's dinner following his homecoming. Zac's report of his missionary experiences was touching. He came home from his mission tired and thin and is leaving on Wednesday for BYU-Provo so SaraKay is feeling a little blue that they are heading in opposite directions for school. It has added some drama on the home front and I'm feeling the stress, too. I wish I could wave a magic wand and get these last two children happily married and launched. Time will tell if anything develops from this friendship that has spanned a decade and been such a huge part of SaraKay's life.

I need to quit and get about my business. We have another funeral today. Lee Brumfield died of cancer leaving his wife, Vickie, a widow. When I visited with her at the viewing, she asked me if she could join my widow's club. I guess she can although it's not a very happy group to be a part of. Anyway, it's our ward's third funeral in a few short weeks. When I was bemoaning the fact to SaraKay, she said, "Mom, get used to it. You are getting older and this is just what is going to happen." (Those were certainly encouraging words from my 20-year-old youthful daughter!)

August 30, 2010

Sunday morning, I awoke to discover a big cold sore on my lip. Usually, I feel them coming and can ward them off with ice packs and Melaleuca oil but I've been so preoccupied that it snuck up on me. I quickly applied some ice and hopefully got it under control. They are a menace and take weeks to work through so I really try to avoid them if at all possible.

I shouldn't be surprised, though. I have had some major decisions to make and as usual, without Daddy here to help, I stew and wrestle and pray and stew some more. My first decision was regarding my van. It has had a few problems the last few months and I have taken it to Countryside Auto for repairs. It usually isn't anything major but nevertheless it has made me realize that it has 160,000 miles on it and that I am going to continue to have some issues with it. Nate has been looking for a van for Maureen and offered to pay me cash for it if I wanted to sell. After going through the process of selling my Toyota pickup through a dealer, I know all too well that by the time they repair and get it ready to sell and then charge a fee for selling it, the end amount is significantly reduced. I have thought that next year when I go on a mission, I will probably want to replace my Avalon, depending on where I go and the demand for a car in that mission. Anyway, after a lot of prayer, I decided to sell the van to Nate. I know that he will continue to get some good use out of it since he is so handy with cars and can fix whatever ails it much better than I can afford to pay Rodney Love continuing repair bills.

The second decision was in regards to my pasture. These last five years Bruce Ellis has run his horses on it and that has kept the grass down so we didn't have to burn it off in the spring. This year he only has one small horse and the pasture grass hasn't all been eaten off. At the end of the season last year Brent Harper came with his swather and baler and did Ellis's and my pasture. It cost me a little but was worth it to know that I wouldn't have to figure out what to do in the spring. This year when I called Bruce, he said that he wasn't going to have his pasture baled so I realized that I was on my own. I called around to find someone who might need some pasture but in the back of my mind I was nervous about strange horses and the damage they might do to my fence line. I have been fortunate to have good fences but know from prior experiences that livestock can destroy a good fence in a hurry.

I was weighing the pros and cons of having livestock brought in that would solve the grass problem but maybe create a worse scenario. I called and left several messages on Harper's answering machine regarding the possibility of them baling it for me but they never responded. I then called Lenny Pincock and asked if he needed additional pasture for his horses. He came over and said that although he needed the pasture, his horses have a problem of working the fences, especially if they are out of their own element.

We walked the fence line and I mentioned Harpers (who are his neighbors) and Lenny said

that he would visit with Brent for me. I received a call later from Lenny saying that Harpers would come this week and cut the grass and bale it next week and that Lenny would pay them and take the hay for his own use. What a relief!

The next decision was in regards to my windbreak. Several months ago, I found out that my willows were shading Hanni's garden and making it difficult to grow anything. I know how much they depend on that garden and so I told Reed that if he wanted to cut down the big tree on the north end that I would be willing to let him do that. Well, from that small beginning a project began to evolve. The Elder's Quorum usually provides some of the needy in our ward with wood for their woodburning stoves and Reed Hanni, who is our Elder's quorum president, asked if they could use some of the wood for their yearly project. Well, after everyone came and saw the size of the trees, the project got a lot more complicated and I began to worry about the time, money, and manpower that it was going to take. I have tried to be a low-maintenance widow considering all the other problems our ward leadership grapples with and I knew that this wood project wasn't an emergency of any kind and I didn't want it to be a burden.

Finally, I approached Reed with the suggestion that I contract with a company to cut down the trees, fell them into the pasture area, and let the Elders come and get the wood they want and help with the clean-up. That put it into a lot more manageable project and I could tell that he was relieved.

Last week I met with two different fellows who own tree removal companies and got two bids. After all was said and done, I decided to remove every other tree so that I don't lose my shade but give the remaining trees room to spread out. It was also mentioned as I talked to these fellows that I have several heavy branches hanging over my fence line and laying on my row of pine trees and that because they are not upright, they are at high risk for breakage which could wreak havoc on my fence. Both bids included removal of those branches.

As you can imagine, whenever I deal with contractors or things that Daddy would usually handle, I feel like a fish out of water and so vulnerable. I don't want to be taken advantage of but I also realize that I need to maintain this place as best I can until I make a decision regarding staying here or moving to a simpler place.

On Saturday I was reading the newspaper and noticed that the Mayers, a couple who bought Crites' home, are being foreclosed on in December. They live across the street from President Jenks. The home will be sold at public auction in December. It caught my eye because I have thought that if I could just get rid of this pasture and the irrigating that I could hire the yard out and leave on a mission without lots of anxiety regarding the place and its upkeep. Anyway, I called Mayers and had a good visit with them and they said that they would be moving in a couple of months and they were just going to turn the house over to the bank since there wasn't anything else they could do.

Now I am debating whether this is an opportunity for me to simplify my life or if this would complicate it and get me into a situation that might be more difficult than what I currently have. I learned that if I bought the home at auction, I would need cash in hand and the only way to do that is to sell this home first. I wouldn't need cash if I bought it from the Mayer's but then I would have a huge house payment each month until I could sell this home and with the market so depressed, that could really put me in a bind. Decisions… decisions! Anyway, it's no wonder I woke up with a cold sore. I am going to try to have a more calming week this week and continue to pray for guidance and answers. Of course, if I am going to sell, do I want to pay to have these trees removed!!! Where is Daddy when I need him!!!

On a lighter note--Peggy Hansen, Zac and SaraKay, and I had a great time at the West Yellowstone Playmill last Tuesday. Peggy and Zac got in a session at the temple and met us at the visitor's center. We drove to Yellowstone together and I think it gave SaraKay and Zac a great time to visit and get reacquainted. Zac brought his computer and they looked at lots of his mission pictures and they talked nonstop both going and coming. He indicated that he will be home for his brother's reception on the 11th so they will have a chance to see each other then. Several of you have asked about the relationship, but we don't really know at this point how Zac is feeling so SaraKay is just giving him time and space to get into school and sort that out. She is leaving next Tuesday for Rexburg and we have a busy week ahead getting her ready.

September 7, 2010

It's a beautiful, sunny day outside despite the high winds we have experienced these last few

days. On Saturday evening SaraKay and I attended Jonathon's wedding in Pocatello. His bride's parents have a lovely home and big yard on the outskirts of Chubbuck and had worked so hard to have it decorated and prepared for the wedding and reception. I wondered when it got so windy here if it was blowing in Chubbuck and hoped that it would cooperate for the festivities. Fortunately, it did and although there was some wind, the event was lovely. It was such a treat to get to see Rick and Terry and all their children.

Jacob and Tenessa are living in Florida. Jacob completed his MBA and is now working for Lockhead. They love Florida. Jake brought their second little girl to visit family for the few short days he was visiting and it was sweet to get to see her. She was all dressed up for the occasion, color coordinated and all! Amanda and her husband are living in Twin Falls where he coaches basketball and football at the high school. Amanda is expecting a baby and they are excited about that. Aubry has just moved back to be with Rick and Terry and will be starting at ISU in January. She's had a rough few months but is hanging in there and making some decisions about the years ahead and what she wants to accomplish. She is a lovely young woman.

Jonathan and his bride, Amber, were beaming and had a big crowd there to celebrate with them. We so enjoyed ourselves and especially enjoyed the chance to see Edith and Howard and the rest of Terry's family. They are so sweet and gracious and went out of their way to make us welcome. One sweet coincidence was that the judge who performed the ceremony was Brian Murray, one of Daddy's best scouting buddies in Pocatello and I was able to visit for a while with him and catch up on his family and he on ours.

Staff made the trip from Lehi but was minus Kaye since she had just had extensive knee surgery and was recovering. She had orthoscopic surgery a few months ago but it didn't take so she was having it redone.

Yesterday we had a stirring fast and testimony meeting. Sue Fife Johnson had all of her seven children, their spouses, and grandchildren there together for the first time in a long time and it was a thrill to see how well they are doing. Kent Fife and his wife were also there and Kent and Sue both bore sweet testimonies. There were so many heartfelt testimonies; I just sat and basked in it. Later when SaraKay arrived home from her singles' meetings she commented that she had born her testimony in her meeting and then Becky called and mentioned that Maddie and Larsen bore theirs. I just had to smile thinking that all over the Church we all were participating in these faith-building meetings! Isn't the gospel wonderful!

Today Nate came and we cut down the pine tree by the front corner of the garage. It lost a large branch last winter and then about a week ago another branch ripped off leaving a gaping hole. Nate offered to help me with it and between him, SaraKay, and me we got it down and disposed of. It really opened up that area and will make mowing the back yard so much easier. All of my big decisions of last week have been resolved and I'm feeling like I can hang on for another year. I even got the hay off the pasture, baled and hauled away. Tonight it's almost chilly outside. Fall is in the air. Tomorrow SaraKay will leave for Rexburg. I'm going to miss her terribly. She brings so much life into this quiet house; her friends are such a wonderful bunch. I need to let go and let her fly.

Tim had a fun weekend in San Francisco with a blind date Steph lined him up with. He was impressed with her and they are going to try to get together in a couple more weeks and continue with the association. He called while he was waiting at the airport and we had a good visit about his weekend as well as BYU football. I've been following the news about them going independent and about TV coverage (which won't start until fall of 2011). I guess several sportscasters have picked BYU as the team *that* will have the toughest year this year because they lost all their "stars" of last year. They say that this year, despite an excellent program and coach, will be a building year. That theory was tested in last week's game when BYU squeaked out a victory against Washington. Tim gave me some interesting stats on how much BYU wins ballgames in the last few minutes and it was amazing!

In closing just let me say how much I've loved having Nate close. He will soon be returning to Washington since the job he is working on will be completed the end of September. On Monday he helped me with several items that I have been worrying about. He is so thoughtful and compassionate. Last week he went with me to assess Mayer's home (Crites). He went through it carefully with me and talked through things. I have been so concerned about what to do with my house and property when I leave for a mission and

I'm looking around for options. After we got home from Mayers it was getting late and I was worried about Nate getting home and getting the rest he needed. He has been having trouble sleeping and I didn't want to be the reason he was tired.

As I went to walk him out to his pickup, he said, "I'm not ready to leave yet. Can I just give you some advice, Sue?" He came back in and expressed to me his feelings about this home and what it means to us as a family and that if I sold right now, he felt it would be devastating to me emotionally and I would really struggle. The minute he said that, I knew it was my answer.

Although it has been hard in some respects lately, I'm trying to find solutions and get things in order. I know that your prayers in my behalf have been answered and I need to exercise more faith and not worry too much about the future-just deal with the present. Yesterday I called my brother, Charles, for his birthday and we had a good visit. I have felt such a love for my siblings lately and their efforts to help me since Steve died. I feel the same for Dad's brothers and sisters. As we age, we come to recognize how precious these relationships are.

September 14, 2010

I've spent the morning working on my family history project. John has been formatting the first part of the book for me and he's pushing me to keep ahead of his formatting. I need that prodding; so many other concerns occupy my time and energies. Our goal is to have this book finished for Christmas but it is taking me longer than I had planned on it taking. I gave myself until I start serving missions to get this personal stuff done but it has taken me nearly a year to get to '84. I have had to compose a lot of it and do research which I will not need to do once I get to '89 when the twins left on their missions and the weekly letters are available to use. Anyway, I'm spending every spare minute at the computer.

My weekend was full and satisfying. SaraKay arrived home (after two days of school) to help with Zac's brother's reception Saturday night. I was the kitchen help and SaraKay provided background music at the piano. It was a fun evening but we were both tired by the time it was over. SaraKay had a little time with Zac but not much. It's been difficult with her in Rexburg and him in Provo but she is excited for the year ahead and the activities she will be involved with. She auditioned for both Collegiate and Vocal Union. Her first choice was Collegiate so she was thrilled to be selected. Brother Kempton asked her if she would consider some accompanying as well as performing with the choir and also asked if she would be willing to play the violin for some of the pieces they will be learning. She was overjoyed with those requests and is excited for this opportunity. The choir is having a retreat on Saturday and that should give all the members a chance to get acquainted.

When she called to tell me about the retreat, I realized that it was going to wreak havoc with our plans for this weekend and Sam's farewell. Our Plan A was to go to Steve and Bonnie's and meet Dave and Andrea and Tim and have a pizza party there Saturday afternoon before going to Steph's to spend the night. We were all looking forward to this but now it is going to happen without SaraKay and I. She will finish up at 11:00 pm and drive home that night so that we can leave early Sunday morning and arrive at Steph's with enough time that SaraKay can help with a musical number that Josh and Katie are doing. Just thinking about all the details that need to be in place for Sunday to run smoothly gets me hyper-ventilating. I just need to relax and realize that it will all come together. I talked with Stephani last night and she said that she is taking Friday off from work so that she will have some extra time to prepare for the influx of company. Lindsay's side of the family will be arriving on Saturday afternoon and Sunday morning, too.

Last Sunday I left about 8:30 for Layton to attend Jake's mission homecoming. Part way there Steve called and asked if he and some of the kids could come along. I was happy for the company and met him, Rachel, Chrissy, Jared, and Anne Marie in Brigham City and we traveled together from there. What fun! It gave me some time to catch up on some of the many activities of the Wellsville Larsens. We talked about their new patio, Rachel's involvement in show choir and running a 5K, Chrissy's new orchestra teacher and cello, Jared's soccer team and his construction of a 1000-piece racetrack, and Anne Marie's piano lessons, new school teacher, and the softball team she is playing on. It made me dizzy just thinking about their comings and goings.

When we walked into the chapel a group of returned missionaries (and Josh) were standing at the podium practicing an arrangement of "Called to Serve." We sat and enjoyed the music and didn't even realize that Karen was sitting on the front bench leading it and Teresa was standing up facing the missionaries and giving tips as the boys

sang. When they finished it was delightful to connect with Karen and Teresa and to get to visit before the meeting.

Jake gave a beautiful report on his time serving in Mexico. It was obvious that he was a great missionary and loved the people he served. When I first saw him, I was stunned at how thin he looked. He has always been thin but he has taken on a more mature look. He had a lot of friends (including cute girls) there to cheer for him as well as extended family. It was fun for us to visit with Brock and Maren and their three little ones (Kellemen, Libby, and Amelia) afterwards at Jim and Karen's while we enjoyed a delicious meal. Jake and Josh are presently roommates and attending USU in Logan.

Teresa, who flew in from Washington D.C., told us that she loves the East and all the enjoyable activities but now that Jake is home it is more difficult to be so far away. She said she feels like she is choosing between "family or fun" and family has a pretty strong pull. She had to be to work Monday morning so she left for her 3:30 flight from the SLC Airport before all the guests left. I'm sure it was hard for her to pull away with the situation being what it was. Karen and Jim certainly can be proud of their family. I could tell that Karen was struggling with tears throughout the sacrament meeting and I could empathize with her. It is such a wonderful thing to welcome a son or daughter home from a mission. It really tugs at your heart strings when they come home and you realize for the first time just how challenging their mission was. Missionaries are not entirely honest in their weekly letters about all the difficulties they endure but when they get home and the truth comes out, it is pretty heart-wrenching. Missions are hard. As one of the early Church History prophets said, "Church work is work."

I spent part of yesterday visiting with an agent about Medicare supplements/co-pays/and other such things. November 1st I will join the ranks of the Medicare group and I'm trying to make an informed decision about what company to sign with. The BSA have a plan that I can continue on but it runs about $100 more a month than other plans and I'm trying to figure out what the difference is. I'm lining up a choir for the post-Trek fireside next Tuesday, helping with our temple shift's summer party this weekend, and arranging for several families in the ward to come get their wood once the trees are felled Thursday morning. I will be relieved when that is over and successfully completed. SaraKay really helped me on Saturday with the yard, especially trimming between the bushes that run along the driveway. I will be leaving for Iowa in October.

September 21, 2010

I've spent part of the morning in my pasture hauling and stacking more branches from the three trees that I had cut down last week. The wind is howling today but it felt good to be out and know that this project is nearing completion. I used the time to think back on some of the joys and frustrations of this past week.

It was so sweet yesterday to join with Stephani and Lindsay as they hosted family for Sam's missionary send-off. Originally, we had planned to be in Wellsville with Steve and Bonnie Saturday afternoon and then spend the night with Bennions, but because of the Collegiate Choir retreat Saturday evening SaraKay couldn't get away and didn't start home from Rexburg until after 11. She phoned to say that she was enroute and I visited with her all the way home to keep her awake. That morning she had participated in the "Temple to Temple" relay from Rexburg to Idaho Falls until nearly one that afternoon so she was worn out from her day's activities. When she got here about midnight, we were both tired and went right to bed, setting our alarms for 5:30.

As you can imagine the night was way too short but we got up and were on the way to Hyde Park by 7:00. SaraKay offered to drive but I had so much adrenaline flowing that I knew I wouldn't be able to rest so I drove and we had a good visit. She's just been in school for 10 days but the pressures and preparations are already piling up. She has a part-time job accompanying a vocal student and also is accompanying four difficult pieces that Collegiate is performing. She was called to be the ward choir director so she is excited about that opportunity.

As we arrived at Steph's about nine, I wondered aloud if we would have to awaken the household since it appeared to be so quiet. SaraKay pointed to little Nate jumping on the trampoline in the back yard and shook her head no. She was right. The whole household was abuzz with life! Steph and Andrea were putting paper on the banquet tables that had been set up in the back yard, Lindsay was vacuuming, Sam was putting the finishing touches on his talk, all the bathrooms were occupied with cousins getting ready for the big day, and their dog, Bay, was

looking for a place to escape the hustle and bustle.

After unloading my car and getting things in the oven, Steph (piano), Katie (flute), SaraKay (violin), and Josh (cello) practiced their musical number in the parlor. They played "If You Could Hie to Kolob" and it was heavenly. Before long most of us were sitting in the parlor with them just enjoying that beautiful music. Even David and Andrea's two little boys, McKay and Nathan, broke away from their toys to join us. Bay positioned herself under the piano and seemed content to be a part of the rehearsal. I kept thinking that some of my most memorable times at our family get togethers are when we are gathered around the piano preparing musical numbers. The music filled their home with the Spirit and set the tone for a wonderful day.

Sam looked so handsome in his new missionary duds and did a great job with his talk. "Kolob" was beautiful and the high councilor's address was touching. Sam's Grandma and Grandpa Black, Grandma and Grandpa Bennion, his Great Grandparents, the Petersons, two of Lindsay's aunts, some cousins from the Bennion side, as well as Lindsay's brother, Chris, and two sisters and their families attended the meeting and joined in the festivities. From our side we had Steve and Bonnie and family, Dave and Andrea and family, Tim, SaraKay, and me. Many close neighbors and friends joined the festivities after the block of meetings and a wonderful group of young single adults that have been a part of Sam's life over the years came for dinner and visiting. Fortunately, Steph had prepared enough food for a mob and there was plenty to eat! To go along with the ham and salads she had ordered two huge potato casserole from a local caterer. (You can take the potato farm girl out of Idaho, but you can't take the Idaho out of the potato farm girl!) It was a wonderful day!

Probably the most poignant experience of the day for me was during the closing song of sacrament meeting. I was sitting flanked on one side by McKay, David, Andrea, Islay and on the other side by Jared, Joseph, Katie, and SaraKay. Sitting in front of me was the row of cousins including Josh, Laurel, Anna Sue, Rachel, Nate, Chrissy, Anne Marie, and Chantelle with little Nate sitting on Tim's lap. The closing song was, "How Firm a Foundation" which has special memories associated with Dad's passing. All the grandchildren had their hymn books open and were singing along. It really struck me how grateful I was that Daddy and I had chosen to make the gospel the center of our lives and that these beautiful grandchildren are the precious fruits of our years of gospel living. The tears started to flow. Fortunately, Andrea was close at hand and moved in with an arm around me that gave me some privacy to work through the emotions. I always feel on these occasions that Daddy could be present and that is a sweet thing to contemplate.

This past week I was on a committee for a summer party for our Friday temple shift ordinance workers. We have planned, collected money, and Saturday I spent several hours in set-up for the party that evening. Although the food was catered, we spent an hour hauling rented banquet tables and chairs into the back yard and decorating for the event. It was held at a beautiful home that overlooked three acres of lawn and the winding Snake River. The setting was awe-inspiring and the weather cooperated and we had a beautiful evening complete with a western band for entertainment. It was satisfying to have the evening turn out so successful.

Part of the drama of the week was getting some trees cut down. I had gotten bids for the job and decided to have them felled on Thursday so that I could get the mess cleaned up and get the water on the pasture. I haven't irrigated since taking off the bales of pasture grass and I've wanted a couple of good waterings before the water is gone from the canal.

Wednesday, I called the fellow who was supposed to come take care of the trees and his big "cherry picker" had broken down and he wasn't going to be able to do it for several weeks. I then called the other fellow and he said they could come Thursday morning. I agreed and they were here about noon and started the job. He removed the three north trees, six-foot sections at a time and dropped all the branches as well as the wood sections in the pasture and over the fence in Hanni’s yard. What a huge mess! I had no idea it was going to make such a mess! Imagine greenery piled about six feet deep over a fifty-foot square area and you have some idea of the amount of branches I was left with. The ones that they shaved off the front of the trees facing the pine trees were relatively small branches with lots of leaves and I worked for several hours Thursday night dragging them into the front part of the pasture and into piles. But the heavy branches that fell into the pasture were layered as they fell and when I tried to remove the small ones, they

were wedged under the heavy ones and wouldn't budge. I knew that several ward members had asked about getting some wood so I had notified them that the wood would be available from Thursday night on and that I was hoping to have it cleaned up and gone so that I could irrigate this Friday.

Thursday night Kelley Johnson arrived with his chain saw and started cutting away but hardly made a dent in the pile. I worked until dark and got the yard cleaned up but the sheer volume of branches was totally overwhelming. Thursday night Rick Earl came over and I showed him the piles and requested that as he cut up the branches that he pile the waste so that we could systematically clean things off. When I left for the temple Friday morning, I was so distraught over the mess that I could hardly focus on my duties. I felt so helpless and recognized that I should have just "bit the bullet" and had the tree cutters clean up the mess and paid the price to have it done. I guess I originally thought that if I had the cutters remove the mess that they would take all the wood and I knew there were families in the area that needed it. Anyway, Reed Hanni, the Elders Quorum president had reassured me that the Elders do a project every fall and that several of them said that they would love some wood. Little did any of us realize just how massive the mess was going to be!

When I arrived home Friday from my temple assignment, I was overjoyed to see that Rick and his children had been hard at work and that they had systematically worked from the south trees to the north, cleaning up all the six-foot lengths and piling the waste. I raked until dark and pretty much raked the length of the windbreak, pulling out all the broken small branches, and making sure that all the usable wood was piled and available.

Saturday morning at 7:30 Kelley Johnson arrived with a saw and trailer and so I went out and worked for a couple more hours with him as he continued to tackle the big trunks and large branches that were piled everywhere. He would cut up a big branch and I would pull off the small branches and pile them and go back for more. He took two trailer loads of branches to the county landfill and continued cutting and working through the mess all day. What a blessing!

This morning I went back out and pulled the remaining branches from the irrigation ditch and continued raking and piling. At 3:00 this afternoon the Elders brought a huge trailer and we loaded a lot of my piles and then we all went over to Sharon Moss's place where she had had a tree trimmed and we spent a couple hours hauling branches and firewood. Although we didn't finish up my stuff, I felt like enough was enough and I could recruit family members when they come to visit to help me finish up what's left.

This project has really been an ordeal and I've decided that unless I have an emergency, I am not doing anything this drastic again. It is just too hard to depend on others who have so many demands on their time and resources anyway. It's been a lesson in restraint since Daddy died, to realize that many of the things that he did are just not possible for me to do and I have got to be so careful that I don't get myself into messes unless I have the expertise and resources to solve my own problems. Emergencies are different but this kind of a project was totally consuming and not totally necessary.

The Hannis realized that I had done it to try to help them with their shade on the garden problem so they very sweet to help with arrangements to get the mess cleaned up. I really appreciated all their help. Tomorrow morning, I am borrowing Brenda's old pickup and going over to work on Sharon's yard for a while, cleaning off the last of the little stuff. I'm glad to be able to help her but grateful that hers wasn't nearly the job that mine was!

September 26, 2010

I've had a sweet Sabbath. It started at 7:00 when John and I had a scheduled call so that I could transmit some more of this history to him to format. He has figured out how to work through Google docs and be able to load a lot of it and then he works with it and prepares it while I work to stay ahead of him here. I always feel guilty when we do this because it usually takes about an hour for him to coach me over the phone so that we can get it done. Laurel has been so patient with me; I know I am taking some of their precious time after the kids are in bed and life settles down a bit in the evening for them.

At eight I received a call from SaraKay who was enroute to the Blackfoot West Stake to attend Angela Winder's mission farewell. She needed several items from home and knew that she wouldn't have time to stop here before heading back to Rexburg for her own college ward meetings. Today was to be her first choir practice and she was really cutting it close as far as

coming and going to make it back in time. It was fun to attend Angela's meeting and get to see her and some of her friends for a few minutes. Some of my dearest friends (Linnea Hammond, Coleen Winder, Peggy Hansen, Deanna Casperson, and Ima Hale) were also there to show support and it was like old home week to see them again.

The tree project is over for a while. I spent part of Wednesday piling another bunch of branches in the pasture and decided that with or without the branches I could still get the water back on the pasture and so I irrigated Friday. I know that these next few weeks are vital as far as getting the lawn and trees and pasture the water they need for the winter so I am trying hard to address that before the water is turned out of the canal the 16th. The Hanni's have been so good to help me with my irrigating since my water turn is not over before I leave for the temple Friday mornings.

The Trek fireside was really fun. It was rewarding to lead the choir of about 30 members, half adults and half youth. It was especially sweet to feel like the Spirit had directed me in my selection of songs. I had decided on "Faith in Every Footstep" and was pleasantly surprised to discover when they showed the Trek DVD that the music they used in the background was the Tabernacle Choir's rendition of that song and so our closing number of the evening tied in beautifully with what was already going on with the program. It was a wonderful final touch to the fireside. I guess this will be the last Trek I will participate in. All three have been choice experiences and worth all the effort.

Sam entered the MTC on Wednesday. Steph and Linds dropped him off and then had a little while with Kate before they headed home. Stephani said it has been very quiet around their house this week compared to the whirlwind it has been the last few years. Our lives are so full of changes.

On Thursday I spent the afternoon at the cannery in Idaho Falls. We were doing pears and Brenda Godfrey and I worked side by side on a conveyor belt cleaning up the halves and preparing them to go in the cans. Every time I do something like that, I feel grateful that I haven't had to work in a warehouse or similar facility day after day. It's good for me to take those assignments because I feel like working at the cannery is "pure religion" as James describes it. *"Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world. (James 1:27)* With all the needs in this world right now for humanitarian aid, it warms my heart to know that the Church is a key player in relieving the suffering. I read an article today that said that the flood in Pakistan has been more costly than the Haitian earthquake and the tsunami combined! Twenty million people homeless and 8 million children displaced. What a tragedy!

After I finished at the cannery I went to lunch with an old friend from high school, Vickie Lindburg. She comes from Seattle each year to visit her mother who lives in Idaho Falls and usually will call and get together with me before she finishes her trip. She lost her husband when she was 33 and has had a pretty tough time of it. She told me that at one point in the last ten years she weighed over 500 pounds and her doctors insisted that she have the lap band surgery. She has had both knees replaced and several other surgeries and since having the lap band surgery she has lost 250 pounds! She looks and feels so much better and is making plans to take a trip to Hawaii and hopes to keep the weight off and have years ahead of a good life. She is a sweet lady and she shared with me some of her experiences as a widow and the tender mercies she has received over the years.

I called Jonie yesterday to get some information from her for my history project and we had a good visit. She and Cory and her baby live together and Alex lives part time with her and part time with Jeff. Jonie's baby is named Jackson and is thriving. Because he was born premature, he was considered disabled and so she, as his caregiver, was able to receive money each month from the government that has enabled her to stay home and care for him and not have to go back to her job for several more months. She said that it is the first time she has had the freedom to really enjoy a new baby and she has been surprised at how much she is enjoying him. I'm glad that he is doing well.

Hopefully each of you women were able to attend the Women's Broadcast on Saturday night. Later Becky called and we visited about it and about how full of hope and encouragement the talks were. That is the wonderful thing about the gospel. It truly is "good news" for each of us if we will but take advantage of the programs that are there for us. I can't imagine my life without it. Enjoy General Conference this weekend. I will be flying out on Friday to spend a few days with

Randy and Shauntel in Iowa and attend Archie's baptism. I hated missing Eliza's but thoroughly enjoyed the wonderful pictures and update that Laurel posted on their family blog. They seem to be doing well and already have a wonderful network of friends who give them support and help.

October 10, 2010

Nate called and invited SaraKay and me to go to Chad and Trish's for dinner after our meetings today so I may not be on chat tonight; it just depends on when we get back. Nate is going to attend my meetings with me today. He said that he didn't dare attend his Shelley ward today because the members of the ward might string him up since the building is still not ready for occupancy and the project is overdue. He said that "stringing someone up" is not an appropriate activity for Sunday so he decided to spend the day with family! He's attended with me before and it's always fun to have him at my side.

The tree and branches saga has come to an end. The Tuesday night before I left for Iowa the scouts and their leaders showed up and offered to do some service for me since I am their assigned widow and they needed a project. Two of the scouts had window squeegees in hand and although my windows do need cleaning, the thought of 12-year-old scouts cleaning them was more than I could fathom since the project is daunting even for me. But I did mention my branches and we walked around to the pasture and I showed them the five piles that were still remaining. Well, they offered to bring trailers and YM and haul most of it away for me. I told them that I was leaving for Iowa and they said that they could do it with or without my help. When I arrived home Thursday night, much to my surprise and delight, all but one pile was gone! What a blessing and wonderful relief to have that project completed and be able to go into the winter with things cleaned up!

On Friday, October 1st I took the airport shuttle and flew out of Salt Lake, arriving in Cedar Rapids at 7:00 that evening. Shauntel was at the airport to greet me and we were soon at her home. The day before Steve and Marilyn had arrived and that afternoon Randy's brother, Matt, and his wife and family arrived. It was a full house with 8 children under the age of twelve as well as seven adults. Fortunately, Shauntel and Randy have plenty of room.

Saturday morning before General Conference Archie and one of his friends were baptized at the stake center in Iowa City. Archie has been so excited for this special event and was sporting a brand-new suit, shirt, and tie for the momentous occasion. Of course, getting all of the family as well as all of us guests up, fed, dressed, and out the door was somewhat of a trick but we did it and had a beautiful experience. It always amazes me just how spiritual baptisms are. Whether it is a convert baptism or not, it is a very sweet time and this one was no exception. After the ordinance and service, a continental breakfast was served.

We arrived back home and caught most of conference that morning and throughout the day thanks to the wonder of the internet! Between sessions we drove to a nearby hiking trail and hiked in to a beautiful little lake. I never cease to marvel at how beautiful the Midwest is. Just walking through the woods was such a delight! The trees were getting their fall foliage and the contrasting colors were stunning. Fall is my favorite season! That evening the men attended the Priesthood session and we continued to visit and enjoy the chance to be together. I couldn't help thinking that Sam was listening to the Priesthood session in the MTC and that David attended the session with Joseph for the first time!

Since conference didn't start until 11:00 Sunday morning we decided to go for another walk around the neighborhood that morning so the kids would have a chance to get some energy expended before the morning session. Shauntel and Randy's home is located in a nice neighborhood that is somewhat removed from the hustle and bustle of traffic and nestled in a beautiful wooded area. There is one central road but others branch off into cul-de-sacs and so traffic is slow and sparse. It was fun to take the little ones in strollers and just let the older kids bike and skate board around us as we walked and talked. The morning was crisp but pleasant and after the stroll the men played kick ball with the kids on the lawn until time for conference. We all gathered in the downstairs family room and caught most of the talks between taking care of little ones and keeping things relatively quiet. I'm sure most of you can identify with that. I'm always grateful that a written copy of the talks arrives in the Ensign and that I can read them thoroughly.

Sunday afternoon the Archibald's left for home and things settled down a little. Archie was heartbroken that his cousins were leaving. He is

such a "people person" and relished every minute of their stay. Shauntel and I spent some time talking over our "projects" for the days ahead. Between school, soccer, YW, pre-school, visiting teaching, volunteering at Archie's school, dance lessons, and cub scouts we did manage to get some of the things done that she hoped we would. We were able to organize the garage and go through several boxes of things that she hadn't gotten unpacked yet. We organized the shelving that lined the walls of the garage and set up an area for the kid's outdoor toys, bikes, skateboards, and storage stuff. We hung curtain rods, ironed, and hung curtains, went through photo albums, hung pictures, brought in outdoor plants for the winter, helped with homework, chased two preschoolers, and even found time for some wonderful late-night talks.

On Wednesday we pulled away from all the tasks and "did lunch" while Kinzie went to her dance lesson. Although it was hurried, we did manage to sit down with a delicious sandwich and salad at a local restaurant and even purchased a "bear claw" to take home and enjoy. When we arrived home from our brief lunch, we put Kinzie down for a nap and went out onto their screened porch and sat on the couch and just relaxed and enjoyed our bear claw and the chance to be together. The patio room is on the main level of the house but their back yard is on a hill and so the room seems to be suspended in the treetops. I couldn't think of anywhere I would have rather been than sitting in those treetops in the comfort and tranquility of the moment and sharing the time with Shauntel. What a wonderful treat for me!

Within a short while the troops arrived home from school and our little "get-away" was over. I so appreciated Randy and Shauntel's hospitality and enjoyed their family. Camille is a lovely girl and doing well with all her involvements. She is still playing violin in the school orchestra and taking piano lessons. Archie is a bundle of energy but doing well in school and enjoys being in the middle of the action. Drake and Kinzie are quite a handful at this point in time but both are of such sweet temperaments and full of smiles. Bedtimes brought time for me to sit with one on each side and read stories and laugh and hug. I kept thinking of a statement that was made years ago by Jackie Gleason in his TV show "The Honeymooners." He used to say, "How sweet it is!"

Shauntel and Randy are at such a demanding time in their lives right now. Randy is putting in long hours at work but for the most part is able to be with family on the weekends. It was wonderful to have him a part of the family activities. Shauntel is a capable homemaker and mother and although her life is harried right now, once Kinzie gets a little older she is going to have a little more space to breathe. I kept telling her, "Just hang in there!"

October 18, 2010

This past week has been full and rewarding. On Sunday Nate, SaraKay, and I went to Chad and Trish's for a barbeque. It was so sweet and thoughtful of them to invite us especially in view of the week they had had. Upon arriving we discovered that their son, Nate, had been in a harvest accident and had broken his arm when it got caught in a conveyor belt. Fortunately, the person running the switch was nearby and got the equipment turned off before something worse than a break occurred. Nate was in a sling and grateful to still have an arm. Their daughter Emily had been struggling with some problems and had spent a couple days in the Primary Children's Hospital. Trish just takes all these things in stride and was as sweet and gracious as a hostess could be. Chad, who is serving in a bishopric, arrived home just in time for the meal and we enjoyed a pleasant visit as well as a delicious meal!

Following dinner SaraKay and I took a walk around the neighborhood and had a few minutes to chat. She is her college ward choir director and suffering from feelings of inadequacy and needed a pep talk. I had to admit that of any church job I have had, choir director was the most intimidating. You feel like you are in front of a firing squad each Sunday! But it was also one of the most enjoyable and satisfying. They have their first performance in sacrament meeting today so I'm hoping that it will be a good one and she will gain confidence.

Nate and I rode to Rexburg and back together and it gave us some good visiting time. The job in Shelley is drawing to a close and he will soon be heading back to Washington. He has been living in Shelley for nearly six months and has been grateful for the job but knows that Maureen needs him back home. Maureen is caring for her mother 24/7 and is also the new early morning seminary teacher for the area; Nate is excited to get to share in that experience. I've loved having Nate close but recognize how hard it has been on him to be so far away from his family.

On Wednesday Kathy and Deniece arrived from Utah. We invited Nate to join us and we had supper together and visited with Nate until he left for home. We continued to visit until way too late but finally said our good nights and agreed that no one would set their alarm. Wow! It's great when you know you can sleep in the next morning for as long as you like!

On Thursday morning we went through part of Grandma Ilene's family history books. Neither Deniece or Kathy had seen most of the picture books I had. Kathy agreed to take them and get an estimate on what it would cost to have them reproduced so that we could get one for each of the grandchildren. I was so grateful for her help and agree that these family history things need to be shared with the family. Later in the morning we donned aprons and spent the rest of the time making apple pies. I had just picked the apples on both trees the day before and with the help of my apple peeler/corer we really turned out some beautiful pies! I froze mine to be baked later and sent Kathy and Deniece home with theirs. It was so fun to be together and just visit while we participated in my apple harvest. By the way, Deniece is a great pie crust maker!

Thursday night our Relief Society had a harvest social and Friday I had my regular day at the temple. Following my shift, I drove to Rexburg to attend SaraKay's choir concert. The Collegiate Choir performed about six numbers and she accompanied two of them. It was so fun to be a part of that event and get a feel for what she is involved in. By the way, she is now learning the French Horn and says it is much easier and fun to play than the trumpet. As a part of her program, she visits schools in the area and observes music classes. She says it gets her so excited to be in the classroom!

(Monday) I just returned from a quick trip to Burley to deliver Mike's birthday gift and spend a while with the family. It seems like a long time since they've been here with all my comings and goings. I got some time with Mike and saw his Amazon pictures and visited with him about his experiences with "The Flying Doctors." I've asked him to make a presentation at our July reunion and share with the family his insights. I arrived during their Bishop's Youth Fireside. It was fun to be a part of that. Mike and Marci have a wonderful relationship with the young people in their ward. Mike is doing some investigating of dental practices in Idaho Falls and Rexburg.

October 25, 2010

I've spent the day identifying pictures in my manuscript. The identifying is easy but dating them is hard for the ones that are oldies. I'm doing the best I can and using "circa" a lot. I called John early Sunday morning to transmit the last of the document and as usual, we had to wrestle with it for a while to get it to transmit. In turn, he transmitted the completed sections to me so that I could identify the pictures by page number and get that completed. I'm pushing to have it completed by November 1st so that I have time to get it published for Christmas.

Sunday was our Primary program. After a rousing practice on Saturday, I knew I was in for a busy time. I thought about wearing my sweat outfit to sacrament meeting but I figured the Primary presidency wouldn't look favorably on it although we all knew that I was going to have a workout by the time the meeting was over. Try to imagine six three-and four-year-olds sitting on the front row behind the podium and staying contained between the ups and downs of the songs. Add to that one little fellow that was visiting with his grandmother and who wanted to join us on the stand and you get a feel for my morning. We were the first group to say our parts and while I was helping the last child to say his part, two of the kids took off down the aisle, going nowhere in particular. After we retrieved them and got them back on their seats it was time for another song. During the song one of the twins who just recently joined my class started fighting with his older brother and I had to pull him out of the group and give him a stern warning that he must behave or his privilege would be taken away. Before the song was over, he rejoined the group and minded his business.

After the third song one of the little boys said very loudly, "Tyler has to pee!" I handed Tyler off to a member of the presidency but then the other little boy decided he did, too, so we had a trip to the bathroom mid program. Next song, the twin started doing his own version of a wave and was moving from side to side bumping the whole row of small children so I pulled him out again (I was hidden by the children standing in front of me singing) and extracted some promises from him and positioned him away from his twin brother and older brother for the next song. (Is the Lord getting back at me for all the trouble Steve and Dave caused Ida Bingham when they were three?)

Anyway, the bathroom boys rejoined our group and things moved along a little smoother until the closing song when the twin became fascinated with the girl who was on his right and her necklace with the huge glass heart on it. She was trying to pay attention to the song director and I could see that Raven wasn't going to take no for an answer. I kept thinking about the little girl's parents and how disappointed they would be if Addie didn't behave in front of all the ward and after quickly weighing Addie's needs against Raven's, I quietly extracted him from the group, held him in my arms, and we stood and sang the last song like that. No one was happier than me to see the meeting over. But the children sounded beautiful, especially singing my favorite new song, "A long time ago in a beautiful place, Children were gathered round Jesus." What a touching song! I survived and when I took my little hooligans to class, we did lots of fun activities and I gave them treats for a job well done.

Lest some of you suspect that I am keeping secrets from you, let me tell everyone that I had my first date on Thursday night to a concert at the Blackfoot Performing Arts Center. I was caught off guard when Walt Osborne called and couldn't think of a reason why I couldn't go so I said yes. Then for two days I agonized over it and wished I had just said, "I'm not ready. Check back in 5 years!" But I didn't, so I went and tried to act natural. He is a very fine and interesting fellow and was such a gentleman but the whole time I was on the date I felt awkward and uncomfortable. On Thursday I talked with some of you and mentioned my upcoming date so I shouldn't have been surprised that several of you called to see how my date went. I received a variety of questions and I felt like you kids were in the role of mother and I was somehow a teenager again. How revolting! The prize for the best question came from Mike. He called to ask about my date and asked, "Well, all I want to know is does he know the value of a dollar?" Does that ring any bells for any of you? I'm glad no one dared ask if I kissed him. No, I didn't and won't although as most of you know, "I'm not against a kiss goodnight!"

SaraKay came home from college Friday night to attend the high school musical and then hung out with friends. She returned to Rexburg Saturday morning to participate in the choir for the annual President's Banquet and spent the rest of the time studying. She has been sick with a cold and it's worn her out but she assures me that she is on the mend. I will be going to Rexburg for another concert next week.

Shauntel and Randy's home in Smithfield is very close to being sold. They have been working with their mortgage company and have a solid buyer and this next week, hopefully, things will come together for that. It will be such a relief after all the worry and financial drain it has been.

Steve's week in China has turned into a month due to some situations that have been developing with his company's suppliers. Bonnie visited with me about it and is supportive of what he is doing. The company will fly him home and he will work here for a week and fly back and work a couple weeks until the situation is resolved.

I am substituting at the temple tomorrow so I will be gone from 9:30 a.m. until 5:30. I worked a night shift last Friday for Linnea Hammond plus some of my day shift so I've had a lot of time at the temple lately. I will still have my Friday shift this week. Each time I go I put our families' names on the prayer roll. We've got so much going on right now it wears me out just thinking about it all. Thank goodness you've been taught correct principles and you are governing yourselves.

November 1, 2010

Last week I spent every available moment at the keyboard trying to finish up the book. I would proof read and transmit it to John and he would send me another list of things I needed to do and I'd do them and transmit again. Once the last draft was in, it was a huge relief. I'm still not sure if it can be ready for Christmas but at least my part is completed and I can get around to winterizing the house and yard now.

Mike and Marci arrived Friday night and we had a pizza party and spent the evening visiting and catching up on their comings and goings. Saturday morning, we decorated sugar cookies for Halloween until the day warmed up and we could go out and enjoy the beautiful fall weather. Marci and I took care of the girls, did some raking in the yard, and picked the last of the apples while Mike took care of some business in Idaho Falls. Amber and Ellie were bundled up against the cold and we all walked out through the pasture so that I could show them the huge stumps from the tree project. We also walked over to show them the canal since it has been the topic of some of Mike's yarns that he spins for the girls at bedtime. We walked to the bridge and lifted the

girls up so that they could peer over the side and try to envision just what it looked like full of water since now it was just a muddy channel full of dying moss with dead and dying weeds on the banks. Ellie and I decided to walk home while Amber and Marci took in the scene a while longer and Amber threw big rocks into the mud at the bottom of the canal. As we walked back to the house, hand in hand, Ellie, who is truly precocious, said, "Grandma, this is fun! I like playing in this horse cage!" (Referring to the pasture) Usually when they come, they can't play in the pasture because there are horses in it but, of course, now it is empty and available for them to explore.

Mike arrived home about one and we had dinner before he and Marci raked more leaves for me and then the bunch left for home. They had big plans for Trick or Treating in their ward that night so they didn't want to miss that. It was a fun time for me and really added some life to my weekend. Mike is on a new schedule now at the clinic and he will have every other Monday and Friday off so they are going to come on a Monday in two weeks and we're going to do some applesauce with all these apples I have accumulated over the last few weeks. Everyone has a bumper crop this year!

I spent two days at the temple last week, substituting on Tuesday as payback for someone substituting for me while I was in Iowa. The good news is that with my China trip I won't miss any temple days since our Friday just happens to fall on Christmas Eve and New Year's Eve and the temple is closed. I love my temple assignment and really relish the time I spent walking those sacred halls. For those of you planning to come for Thanksgiving, feel free to come and stay even if I'll be gone. Let me know your plans.

November 7, 2010

The weather this past week has been delightful. I've so enjoyed the beautiful fall colors and sunny days and have used the time to clear off my flower beds, cut the lawn one last time, rake some leaves, put away the pots, and clean the garage in anticipation of the colder weather.

I have also spent a considerable amount of time this week tracking my transition into Medicare and making sure that everyone involved had my information correct and that all my automatic withdrawals from my checking account were accurate as I am making a change in my health insurance and don't want to be making double payments. Sure enough, my BSA insurance overcharged me and I had to make numerous phone calls to try to clear it up. I thought I had done everything humanly possible to make this transition painless but not so. Today I received an email stating that I needed to do some other steps to get the premium refunded and the correct amount verified. I spent almost three hours one morning on the phone to three separate entities to get it straightened out. I can't believe how frustrating it has been!

After the problems Daddy had when his identity was stolen, I have been pretty paranoid about keeping a close eye on my accounts. I love having my information on-line but I am amazed at just how much of my personal information has to be constantly given out when it comes to business matters. So far, I haven't had any problems but it is a constant concern.

I've had a very enjoyable time this week. On Thursday night I attended SaraKay's fall concert and really enjoyed that chance to spend some time with her as well as go to the performances. She accompanied two of the songs and did a great job. Their choir is really amazing and her participation in it is the highlight of her life. It is hard to believe that she will be performing her junior recital next semester and will be finishing up her student teaching a year from now. She has applied to do her teaching in Chandler or Gilbert AZ and is hoping to break out of her normal surroundings and spread her wings a little. Becky and family have encouraged it so I guess we'll see what happens.

Friday I had my usual day at the temple. It is always a sweet experience and I continue to learn each time I get a new assignment. I feel so fortunate to have this calling and thoroughly enjoy the association with the other workers as well as the opportunity to immerse myself in the wonderful spirit and peace.

Yesterday I spent the day on some family history stuff and got so involved that I totally forgot that I had invited Brenda Godfrey to go with me to the Jon Schmidt concert that was hosted last night in our Snake River High School auditorium as a fundraiser for the Snake River Fine Arts. Brenda called about 6:45 and asked what I was planning to wear. I think I would have completely forgotten if she hadn't called but I hurried and got ready and we went over together using the tickets that John and Laurel purchased for me for my birthday. We walked in and looked at our tickets and low and behold! we were on the first row, front and center! Talk about great tickets! We had the time

of our lives and thoroughly enjoyed Jon's music and antics! What a talented fellow! I know that most of you have attended his concerts but this was a first for me. I had heard most of his pieces before because of all the CD's we have, but what fun to be there in person.

Brenda is a great fan of his, too, so it was fun to go with her. I guess that Bishop Godfrey listened to a lot of Jon's music when he was so sick and confined to bed and so it was pretty emotional for Brenda as the piece "Tribute" was played. Jon gave workshops all day long for piano students as well as for teachers and parents and it was a wonderful day. I love how our area fosters the arts and I take pride in the fact that our family contributed in some small way to that emphasis. Sometimes when I see this next generation taking hold and continuing the tradition, I wish I had some of you kids back here participating. I know you would be doing that since you are all involved with your own families with the arts and strengthening your own programs.

With the time change this morning I have been up for about four hours and trying to be productive with this extra hour I have been given. One plus is that we are now on the same time as AZ so that makes it a little nicer for me and Becky. I'm not sure how that affects me and Shanghai but I need to find that out before I call John and Laurel in the middle of the night!

As Becky related in her family update, as of the 4th her divorce is final. She has had her ups and downs but I think her strength and everyone's prayers have supported her through the last tough months. Chet was fair in the settlement and they are on good terms which is so important as they continue to share in the parenting process. Thanks to all of you who have been supportive to her. I know she has felt the strength of your concern and prayers and is now facing forward and approaching the task ahead with optimism.

Tim has been under tremendous stress in his work with the implementation of the new software the company is using. The buck really does stop with him as the "tax man" and it has been overwhelming to field all the calls and deal with all the problems. Remember him in your prayers. Also keep Steve in mind. As Bonnie related in her update, the newness has worn off and he is putting in long hours trying to get the system to work and succeed. Bonnie is pushing through the loneliness and challenges of being a single parent for now and I know she and Steve could use our prayers, too. I guess, to be honest, each of you have situations that are taxing and challenging and we just really need to continue to pray for each other and the strength to meet the day with courage and faith. How I love you and pray for you.

November 21, 2010

It's a beautiful, snowy day outside. We awoke to a winter wonderland, complete with huge snowflakes and lots of wet snow flocking all the trees and bushes. It was a perfect day to just curl up by a warm fire and read a good book! But it was also a perfect day to be in the temple, fortunately riding to and from with Brenda Godfrey who has a four-wheel drive vehicle! We thought that the worst of the roads would be right here in Moreland but when we got to I-15 we were surprised to find that it was even worse than it was here. Between Blackfoot and Idaho Falls we saw about 10 slide-offs, lots of police cars, and one vehicle that had rolled enough times that it had knocked down a farmers fence as well as two trucks with trailers that were on their side. Were we careful? You can bet we were, creeping along at about 40 mph but arriving safe and sound (but late) to our prayer meeting for our Saturday shift.

The temple was a little quieter than usual due to the inclement weather, but there were still several bridal parties who braved the snow and showed up to attend the weddings. One of these parties was the Annette Bono family who were there for a wedding and a missionary endowment. What a celebration for them. I broke away from my usual activities and said hello to most of them including Richard, Jim, John, Catherine, Suzanne, Daniel, and Annette. Jim and his wife and family were visiting from Nebraska for their oldest daughter's wedding since they knew that if they held the wedding in Nebraska, they would be alone and if they came to Idaho, they would have the support of all the siblings. What a wonderful day for them! They all looked good and seem to be prospering.

Yesterday I took a turn in the Celestial Room and witnessed several family reunions as the new missionary or other "first" endowments came through the veil. What a thrill and what joy to see the families embrace with tears flowing down their cheeks! The temple is such a wonderful place to serve!

SaraKay arrived home Friday night and spent yesterday doing homework and practicing. She was glad that I was gone since she had a lot to get

done and knew that if I was home, we would just sit and visit and she wouldn't get anything accomplished. Her goal is to get all her homework done before company arrives for Thanksgiving so she can enjoy the time together. My goal is to be organized enough that everything runs smoothly and that there is plenty to eat! The next few days will be busy ones. Hopefully the weather will cooperate and the roads will be clear and dry for the travelers.

Mike now has every other Monday off and since it is easier for me to have them visit on Sunday evening and Monday than on the weekend, that was what they did. Marci and I had big plans for the rest of the apples from my three trees and Mike had business in Idaho Falls and Rexburg. I had spent several days drying some as well as making pies and I was more than ready to make the rest of them into sauce before they got spoiled or soft.

Mike and Marci arrived fairly early on Sunday since they had stake conference that day (as did SaraKay and I). We had dinner and then just relaxed as the little girls played downstairs. Afterwards we got to bed at a fairly decent time and arose in time for Mike to get out the door for his appointments. Marci and I got an early start on the apples that were in a wheelbarrow in the garage. Marci washed them and got them on to boil while I put my Victoria Strainer together. How distressing to find that I was missing a key piece of the mechanism and although I tried to make do without the piece, I could tell it was putting a strain on the equipment. I started calling around to find a piece. Melanie was not home but I was able to reach Brenda and she was willing to lend it to me if I promised (on a stack of Bibles) that I would return it. That is just how much we Mormon women guard our canning equipment!

Anyway, after installing the missing part we got serious and soon were up to our elbows in applesauce. Lucky for us Olivia went down early for a nap and didn't rouse until 11:30 which was about the time we were finishing. What a job! I haven't done applesauce for a lot of years and I had forgotten just how much work it is! We ended up with 18 quarts. It took us most of the rest of the day to clean up and process it before they left for home about six that evening.

While I processed the bottles, Marci and Ellie went outside and raked leaves for me. I've been outside raking leaves several times this past week trying to get them done before my company arrives this week but the wind has been persistent and it's been a lost cause. At least the leaves have finally fallen and if weather and time permits, I will employ some of my guests this week to help dispose of the last of them. Right now they are covered with a layer of snow and from the weather reports it may not clear off.

I so enjoy Mike and Marci and their three little girls. They are a delightful bunch. Just before they left on Monday I was in my office and Ellie came in and said, "Grandma, I think you have lost your Grandpa because I haven't seen him anywhere in this house." I assured her that he wasn't around but not really lost, just away in heaven. It touched me that she would be looking for him and wondering where he was.

Andrea called this week and mentioned that Mark and Rita, Jessica, Sean, and Jo had paid them a sweet visit. She said Mark was so good to the children and they about wore him out before the visit was over. She said that Mark was a wonderful grandfather figure and he really went out of his way to make a fuss over the kids. Thanks, Mark, for being a surrogate grandfather for Steve.

On Wednesday evening I made a quick trip to Logan to see Rachel's musical, "Annie, Get Your Gun!" What fun! And Rachel did a great job! Bonnie had prepared a delicious ham dinner complete with homemade applesauce! It was so good and surprising when she told me that instead of canning it in bottles, they put it in plastic bags and froze it! (Okay, Marci, next year we'll try that!) Anyway, I thoroughly enjoyed my short stay with Steve and Bonnie and family and loved getting to see Rachel perform.

Becky called early this morning to report on their weekend. Cole's birthday was yesterday as well as his baptism and Tim flew in Thursday to help them celebrate as well as to perform the ordinances. Chet was there, also, and afterwards at the house they had a happy mob of ward members who came to dinner and helped them celebrate. She said the whole day was very special and a delight!

Thanks to all of you for your remembrances on my birthday. By the time I had gotten all the cards, gifts, phone calls, emails, and other thoughtful gestures, I felt like the most popular woman in America! I know I'm not but that is how I felt. Thank you to each of you for remembering me and making my life so rich and full! Hopefully each of you will take time this week to recognize

the many blessings which fill our lives and give thanks for the Lord's many tender mercies to us as an extended family as well as individually.

November 28, 2010

I am sitting in a warm house surrounded outside by several feet of snow. When I got up this morning and saw the snowstorm outside, I couldn't believe it! I think we have had more snow in this past week than we had all winter last year. SaraKay and I bundled up and went outside to shovel the cement pad and front walk so that we could get out for our meetings today but the snow was falling so fast that by 10:00 when my home teacher, Nic Barnard, showed up with his shovel in hand, it looked like we hadn't shoveled at all. SaraKay attended my meetings; she was accompanying the Sue Fife Johnson family in a musical number.

We felt fortunate to make it out of the driveway. When we arrived at the stake center there was a mass exodus of cars and I guessed that the Moreland Third Ward had cancelled the rest of their meetings because of the storm. Our ward followed suit and so did the single's branch. Shortly after arriving home, I heard the sounds of a snowblower and shovels and the Deacon's quorum as well as my home teacher, Dakota Albertson, were hard at work on my driveway. I grabbed my coat and shovel and we all made short work of it. I was so grateful for all the help I received.

It was a real treat last week to have SaraKay here since BYU-I dismissed school the previous Friday. She had all kinds of homework and practicing to do but we had the house all to ourselves for several days and she chipped away at everything until she felt like she was prepared to return to school this week. Last Sunday a terrible snow and wind storm moved into the area and we were pretty much housebound for Monday-Wednesday when it finally blew itself out. Today SaraKay left about four for Rexburg. I was so worried about her making that trip on icy roads but one of her friends called and said that the roads from the lavas to Rexburg were pretty much dry and bare. What a relief! I guess our area was hit the hardest and the rest of the valley didn't get the precipitation we did.

Our Thanksgiving weekend was so enjoyable although those who traveled had their share of woes, especially Mike and Marci and Tim who weathered icy slick roads that slowed traffic to a crawl. Tim left Boise Wednesday afternoon expecting about a two-hour trip to Burley and got caught on horrendous roads with lots of slide-offs and even some large semi-trucks that blocked traffic. He said that one time traffic came to a complete stand still and he sat in his car reading something on his laptop until the accident was cleared away and he was able to continue. Mike called us here at home and said that Tim was still not to Burley and we all encouraged them to just wait until morning to make the trip but they thought they could make it and so they arrived about 11:00 Wednesday night with three sleepy little girls and one tired Tim!

Steve and Bonnie and Steph and Linds and families arrived that evening and I was grateful that the terrible storm that had been forecast for the Cache Valley area didn't prove to be as lethal as was predicted. I really appreciated Linds coming since he has been dealing with sciatic nerve problems and is hobbling a little. He was right down in bed a couple weeks ago but has been to a doctor and hopes to get some relief soon. David and Andrea cancelled their plans to come when David injured his back helping someone in the ward move. He was miserable and the doctor encouraged him to put ice packs on his back and take it easy for a few days. After the marathon trip for Tim, I was grateful that David and Andrea and kids weren't fighting the storms.

Thursday night we had a musical program and enjoyed hearing from several of the kids as well as SaraKay. We all enjoyed the time together despite the inclement weather and some of the kids even went outside to play in the snow drifts and make snow caves. Friday morning Steph and family and Steve and family left for home and I left for my temple assignment. Those left at home commented later that it was so quiet and boring at home with most of the company gone that they even made a trip to Wal-Mart just to break up the boredom. When I arrived home about five thirty, we had supper and watched a movie while Tim went on a date with a girl from the singles branch. Later he brought her here to play some games.

I heard from several of you who are away and was grateful that each family had something special to look forward to on the holiday. Shauntel and kids joined Randy in Chicago where he was attending a convention and did some sight-seeing; John and Laurel and family joined with other families to share a Thanksgiving feast. When John called, he and James were just finishing up baking some

homemade rolls. James told me that they made 84 rolls but he thought his dad had already eaten one so they would only be taking 83 to the party; Paul and Jenny drove to Wisconsin and spent the holiday with her brother, Spencer and his wife and family; Dave and Andrea had a big dinner at their ward building with several other families in their area and not only enjoyed the meal but had a chance to do some fellowshipping of less active members of their ward. Becky and bunch drove to share the holiday weekend with Don and Lisa at their cabin near Flagstaff. It was really fun! Don took them shooting and they also explored some lava chutes and caves which were full of interesting things. Becky so enjoyed the visits with Don and Lisa and their family and got better acquainted with Whitni and Ryan and their new baby. Becky appreciated the invitation and all their efforts to help them have a memorable holiday.

I had to be to the temple by 9:00 on Saturday so it was an early morning for me. Mike and Marci and Tim left for Burley a while later so that they could arrive in time to watch the BYU-Utah football game. Things were so slow at the temple that they let Brenda and me leave early so we arrived home about 3:30.

When I put the garage door up, there stood SaraKay with Tim's car keys in hand. He had called to say that he discovered in all the hurry to pack up and leave he had forgotten them and so SaraKay was just getting ready to drive to meet him half way with his keys. I was so grateful that I arrived home in time to take SaraKay and that she didn't have to make that trip alone. We kept in touch with Tim via our cell phones and arrived in American Falls within a couple minutes of each other and made the exchange. The only downside of it was that Tim wasn't able to watch the last half of the game on TV because he was driving to meet us. What a disappointment to come so close and lose by one point!

Tim called later enroute to Boise and said that he was in another huge snowstorm and driving about 35-45 m/p/h. I'm not sure he will ever consider coming for Thanksgiving again with all the troubles he had this year.

I met tonight with President Jenks. I volunteered to serve a local mission this next year while I wait for SaraKay to finish up her schooling. He had really pleaded with our stake membership last stake conference for retirees to be willing to serve and although as a single woman my options are limited, I talked to Bishop Adams last week about it and tonight I met with President Jenks. We discussed my time constraints and he was going to get some more information about it but he thinks they will call me to work in the Family History Library in Idaho Falls a couple of days a week. I'll keep you in touch with what develops but I'm assuming that it will be after the holidays before I start.

I would like to suggest that each of us include Tim in our fast this next Sunday. He has been struggling with back problems and has been going to a chiropractor for several months with little if any improvement. He is in a lot of discomfort and pretty stoved up (as Daddy would say) and needs to get some relief. Maybe include David and Linds on that "back" issue and add Shauntel who has recently been called to serve as YW president in her ward.

On Thursday when we sat down to our Thanksgiving feast, we went around the table and each commented on something we were grateful for. I instructed that we couldn't say family or God so we broadened out the responses and heard some sweet things from each participant. After going around once we went around again and that also was fun to dig a little deeper and name some other blessings. It was unanimous that our lives are rich and full and that daily we see the hand of the Lord in our lives and feel of His support and love. Of special note was the fact that each family's provider has a job and that despite the times, we are able to meet our needs.

December 5, 2010

As most of you are aware, in our last stake conference President Jenks put out a plea for more senior missionaries and clarified that if we didn't feel like we could leave our home that the brethren have authorized part-time missions that are served locally and that the person can stay in their own home. I thought that fit my situation right now until SaraKay comes of age to serve so I talked with Bishop Adams and he contacted President Jenks and he visited me last Sunday and gave me a choice of the positions available in our area. I didn't realize that I would get to choose so I was all geared up to just "go where you want me to go" but he said I had a choice in the matter. He encouraged me to look over the options.

I immediately noticed that the Family History Library in Idaho Falls needed staff members so I called the fellow in charge and set up an interview

with him after my temple assignment on Thursday. By five that evening I had been interviewed and received a missionary form to complete and submit to the bishop. I did that today and Bishop Adams will pass it on to President Jenks. I guess I will get an official call and be set apart although the assignment won't come as a surprise since Brother Lyons already told me that I could start on January 10th for training. I will work two days a week at the Center and keep my temple day unless it gets to be too much.

I know I've got a lot to learn but it's stuff I've been anxious to learn since after I get my own family histories written and published, research is the next step. I hope there will be time at the Center when I can work on some of my own lines.

My day in the temple on Friday was wonderful. Two families in our ward had weddings; Dave and Barbara Hansen's son, Ty, married Ashley Blight and the Parkinson's son, Chad, was sealed to his wife, Lindzi. It was pretty teary for the parents and grandparents of both couples. What fun to be a part of these momentous occasions!

Saturday was the first time in weeks that I had time to sit down and figure out Christmas. I'd made some pecan logs last week and it is always a relief to have that done. I got the tree up, lights on, and the house decorated and I'm enjoying the ambience of the lighted tree. Even when you are a widow living alone the Christmas season is magical and exciting! Becky and kids will arrive on the 17th, SaraKay later that night, and then we will all leave on the 19th for Boise with a stopover to visit the Burley Larsens. Becky has big plans to visit Dave and Andrea, Tim, some friends they knew in Asia, and Michelle Dubois before returning here and catching a flight out on the 23rd. A busy but fun trip!

Tim, SaraKay, and I fly out early Tuesday morning from the Boise airport and return on the 30th. It will certainly be a change of pace for us! I have been reading a huge picture book that a friend at the temple loaned me from the time she visited China and it is just fascinating. Now if I can just put aside my fears that China is the next site of the next big natural disaster and it is going to happen during the ten days I am visiting and staying in a 60-story building in Beijing! John assures me that Shanghai and Beijing are too far inland for a tsunami so at least I can cross that off my worry list!

This morning I awoke worrying about a decision as to whether to extend my warranty on the Avalon. I have been working the numbers and praying that I would get some inspiration on it and maybe awaking at 4:00 a.m. with that on my mind could be considered a "stupor of thought.” Anyway, I've felt a little "stupored" all day from lack of sleep. Wrestling five little Sunbeams during Primary about did me in today. As a part of our "Follow the Prophet" lesson we were supposed to play "Follow the Leader.” Well, the kids were so wired that the actions they chose were all karate moves and it was really hard to keep the lid on it. I always pray when I have mayhem like that, that a member of the presidency doesn't poke her head in and ask what is going on.

December 12, 2010

I awoke this morning to a beautiful wintery day. During the night a skiff of snow fell, covering everything with a cleansing white powder. We have had a lot of rain this past week and most of our November snow accumulation has melted off. I'm praying that the weather these next few weeks will permit us to do all that we have planned in conjunction with our China trip. Becky will be flying in on Friday to spend a week visiting family and friends and SaraKay and I will be leaving on the 19th for Boise to spend time with Mike and Marci and a day with Dave and Andrea and Tim before we fly out early Tuesday morning. I am trying to be excited about all this but the worry of the weather along with all the details of flying internationally has given me some anxious moments and my apprehension is overshadowing my excitement for the time being. It made me feel a little better about my fears when Mike called and visited with me about it and mentioned that he had the same kind of fears when he went on his humanitarian mission to the Galapagos Islands this past year.

This past week has been a productive one. I've had the time to mentally walk through all the upcoming events and get things ready for them. I also received the family history books back from the publisher and got those mailed off and other Christmas details completed. Hopefully they will arrive at their destinations in time for the big day. I hope that each of you feel that the book is a fair representation of our family’s activities until ’84. If you are too busy to read through it all, I would recommend the last section intitled “Family Memories.” It's my favorite part of the book.

This past week was full of melancholy moments. On Tuesday the ward scouts dropped by with the traditional basket of goodies for me. This year I was ready for them and had goodies for them, too. It was fun to host them but it always seems a little strange to realize that I am now a member of the singles group. I have to remind myself that for some to give, others must receive and now I'm on the receiving end and need to be gracious about it.

On Wednesday night I attended the Snake River Community Orchestra concert. I thoroughly enjoyed the music but there are so many memories tied to Linnea and the orchestra that it was a difficult night. I kept trying to shake myself out of it but made a hasty exit when it was over so that I didn't get caught teary-eyed.

On Friday I enjoyed my day at the temple but found the emotions close to the surface again. There is something about this time of year that gets to me. After my temple session I drove to Rexburg for an early concert for several of the performing groups at BYU-I. I had a little time to visit with SaraKay before the performance and then joined a standing-room-only crowd in the Barrus Concert Hall for a truly spectacular concert! One group that performed alone as well as with the choirs was a brass band. The trumpets were amazing and of course, I sat there thinking about just how much Daddy would have loved to have heard them! No one appreciated a brass band like Daddy. For the finale numbers the combined choirs performed with the band and it was truly heavenly!

It is a very wearing exercise to be moved to tears by glorious music and to be fighting to keep control so that you don't look all red-eyed and nosed when the concert is over. It brought me some consolation to see others fighting the same battle. It was just such a glorious time. I had a few minutes with SaraKay after the concert but they had a second performance at 8:30 so she was in a hurry to be ready for that.

On Saturday she called and we visited about the second performance and she said that it had gone even better than the first. She said that following the concert she started crying and couldn't quit. Being a part of the choir has really strengthened her testimony and this Christmas music bore witness to her of the Savior's divinity each time it was sung. She has also been under so much stress these last weeks with helping five students get ready for juries, get herself ready for juries on Tuesday, fine tune her accompaniments for Collegiate Choir, finish her practicing requirements for vocal lessons, as well as the demands of her other classes. I think she was also feeling some emotions about Dad as I'm sure many of you do at this time of year.

I've got a big day ahead with teaching Primary, performing in our stake choir concert, hosting Mike and girls tonight and tomorrow morning while he takes care of business in Idaho Falls (Marci has spent the last few days right down in bed sick with the flu) and making some Christmas deliveries to friends and neighbors. Life is good. We live in a wonderful day and age in a wonderful country and community. I love each of you and hope that you can find time in all your busy preparations to remember the "Reason for the Season."